



# Stress Management

## About this Topic: Stress Management



### Topic Mentor

#### Dr. Edward Hallowell

Dr. Edward Hallowell has been an instructor at Harvard Medical School and the founder of the Hallowell Center for Cognitive and Emotional Health in Sudbury and Andover, MA. Dr. Hallowell is a recognized expert on the topics of worry and stress, its causes and cures. He frequently appears in the national news media and on shows such as "Oprah," "20/20," "The Today Show," and "Good Morning America." He is the author of several best-selling books, including his recent releases, *Dare to Forgive, Connect: 12 Vital Ties that Open Your Heart, Lengthen Your Life and Deepen Your Soul*, and *Worry: Hope and Help for a Common Problem*. You can find out more about Dr. Hallowell and his work at his Web site: [www.drhallowell.com](http://www.drhallowell.com).

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## What Would You Do?

What would you do?

When Daniel accepted the promotion, he felt confident that he would be able to handle the increased responsibilities that came with the new position. One month into the job, however, Daniel wondered if he had made the wrong decision. Managing ten direct reports was a full-time job in and of itself. In addition, he was responsible for generating a new marketing plan, overseeing a huge budget, and serving on multiple task forces. Even though Daniel was staying on top of things, he felt increasingly overwhelmed and tired. He hadn't eaten in days. Leaving the office at 8:00 p.m. had become the norm. He wished there was something he could do to make things better, but what?

What would you do?

Daniel could follow a rational, step-by-step process to examine and improve his stress level. The "Evaluate-Plan-Remediate" approach works by breaking down the problems that are causing stress into smaller, more manageable units that can be resolved. First, Daniel should identify the problem at hand—namely that he's overworked and has too many responsibilities. Next, he should think about structuring his time differently. He should set reasonable goals, prioritize them, and break them down into manageable tasks. After that, he should take direct action. He should meet with his supervisor and discuss ways to relieve his workload or delegate some of his responsibilities. By confronting and taking charge of his situation, Daniel will likely reduce his stress level.

In this topic, you'll learn how to recognize the signs that you're under too much stress, explore the causes of stress, and set priorities so you can focus your energy on what really needs to get done.

Stress is an inescapable part of the workplace. But how do you keep your stress level under control?

## Topic Objectives

This topic has information on how to:

- Understand the problem of excessive stress and worry in the workplace
- Identify ways to manage your own stress
- Develop strategies for turning worry into action
- Let your body help you deal with stress
- Practice good stress habits
- Help others deal with excess stress and toxic worry

## The word on worry



Are worry and stress really such bad things? Or are we just making a big deal out of a normal state of mind and feeling? Some worry or stress is a necessary and important part of our lives, but in today's fast-paced work world, these natural human responses often spiral out of control and become toxic to our productivity, our peace of mind, and our health. Just see what some experts have to say:

*"According to a University of Chicago survey, more than 40% of Americans suffer stress in the workplace."* NPR, Morning Edition

*"Job stress today accounts for more than 50% of the 550 million workdays lost annually because of absenteeism."* K. R. S. Edstrom

*"Information anxiety is a chronic malaise, a pervasive fear that we're about to be overwhelmed by the very material we need to master in order to function in this world."* Richard Saul Wurman, "Overload"

According to the World Health Organization, *"job stress [is] a world-wide epidemic."*

*"What were once considered crisis-mode workloads have now become business as usual."* Jennifer Laabs, Workforce

## Why be concerned about stress?

“ More heart attacks occur Mondays between six a.m. and noon than during any other time. ”

–Harry Dassah, M.D., cardiologist

So, why be concerned, particularly in the workplace? There are many reasons. What seems normal and familiar—a feeling of worry and anxiety about your daily activities—may be preventing you or your team members from reaching personal and professional goals. Left unchecked, toxic stress can:

- **Reduce productivity.** Toxic stress contributes to decreased productivity, absenteeism, and employee turnover. When employees start making mistakes or slow down on the job, stay home to avoid stressful work situations, or even quit, hoping to find a less stressful position somewhere else, the productivity of your team or the people you supervise can be directly affected.
- **Affect health.** Too much prolonged stress can make you physically ill, and can even kill you. Your body reacts to stress as it would to any dangerous physical situation, raising blood pressure and alerting the senses. This response protects you and can be beneficial for a brief time; however, prolonged stress, worry, and anxiety can strain your body beyond its limits.
- **Drain energy.** Excess worry, stress, and anxiety can drain you of energy, causing your work and your personal life to suffer. You need energy to concentrate well, respond effectively, and judge

situations appropriately. Worry uses up your energy, depriving you of the physical, mental, or emotional resources needed to do the job well.

- **Damage relationships.** Stress can disrupt relationships—whether at work or at home. While there are often mismatched personalities in work situations that can cause interpersonal conflicts, stress can accentuate these negative feelings or can aggravate existing situations, causing small problems to seem large and disturbing the functioning of an entire team.

## Key Idea: The basic equation of worry

### Key Idea

What causes toxic worry? When you feel vulnerable to the perceived threats in your world, *and* you feel that you have less power to control your world, your level of worry and anxiety will often increase. In mathematical terms:

Increased vulnerability + Decreased power = Increased worry

A sense of **increased vulnerability** causes you to exaggerate danger, so that a small problem becomes a huge nightmare.

For example, if one month your department's direct costs exceed its budget, you might imagine that the entire year's budget will be engulfed by unforeseen costs.

A feeling of **decreased power** causes you to underestimate or forget the power you have to combat danger.

For example, when confronted with the cost overrun, you might forget that you have the power to assess the causes of the overrun and make adjustments to remedy the situation in the following months.

**Increased worry** hinders you from making rational decisions and taking positive actions to resolve problems.

This basic equation of worry expresses how toxic worry can arise not from actual danger but from imagined peril. It helps explain how a worried mind can be very creative in anticipating threatening situations that are unlikely to occur.

Worry is the root cause of most workplace stress. But what causes toxic worry?

## Negative stress cycle

Once increased worry sets in, it may be difficult to readjust your worry balance. The diagram of the negative stress cycle below shows how stress and anxiety symptoms can become a self-perpetuating set of interactions.

Breaking out of the negative stress cycle is an important first step in achieving a healthy worry balance.

## Bad things really do happen

It is true, however, that bad things really do happen, and at times what seems to be excessive worry is actually appropriate for the situation.

If your company is unexpectedly acquired by another, fears of downsizing may be perfectly justified. Or if you're an entrepreneur facing a cash-flow squeeze, and you know the bank could suddenly call in your line of credit, you may feel justified in fearing just such an event.

In these situations, the "work of worry," or good worry, can give you the energy you need to deal with the problems. By anticipating the reality, you can be preparing possible solutions. The important thing is to know the difference between healthy, protective worry that can help you and toxic worry that can harm you.

## Key Idea: The dynamic power of worry

### Key Idea

Because bad things do happen and because there are high-tension times when we have to be alert, we do need some worry to survive. Worry is our natural defense to a threatening situation, helping us to react quickly and effectively. So up to a point, worry and anxiety are healthy responses.

At first, as anxiety or worry increases, performance also increases. But at a certain point, anxiety becomes excessive and begins to depress performance. This relationship is expressed in the "Performance Anxiety Curve."

An important goal of every business person is to find that level of anxiety that will bring about peak performance while avoiding the additional anxiety that becomes toxic to your team or direct reports, as well as to your professional and personal health.

Worry isn't always bad. But realize that there is a point at which worry decreases your performance.

## The business value of wise worry

“ Good worry is informed anticipation. ”  
—Edward M. Hallowell, M.D.

When worry moves from personal fear to clear-headed anticipation, worry energy can make you productive and creative, helping you to discover new solutions to business challenges. Some high-tension worry at work can give you the impetus and adrenaline needed to focus more clearly and perform at a higher level. For example, healthy, positive stress can energize you for action when you have to:

- Meet critical deadlines
- Present an exciting proposal
- Solve new problems

- Feel in control
- Contribute to a team effort
- Learn new skills
- Start a new job
- Deal with a crisis

Wise worry in anticipation can help you prepare for these events, and positive stress during an event can give you the power and vigor to get the job done.

## Different strokes for different folks

Some people actually thrive in the high-risk world of trading in the futures market or investing in high-tech start-ups or meeting creative goals in advertising. But other folks prefer a more stable work environment, something more predictable and manageable. The downside of stress is that too much can lead to early burnout and too little can make it easy for people to underproduce. But for each person there is a level of stress at the peak of the Performance Anxiety Curve that helps that person maximize his or her work goals.

## Do you have a problem?



Wise worry helps many businesspeople perform effectively by giving them the foresight and insight to solve business problems. But toxic worry can distort their perception of problems and hamper their efforts to deal with them.

How, then, can you tell whether the stress you feel is healthy or not? How can you discover if you are a problem worrier at work? Simply put, when worry or stress interferes with your productive work, then you do have a problem. Problem worriers exaggerate fears, spend too much time on nonconstructive concerns, fail to make decisions, and are slow to produce results.

If you suspect, or already know, that stress is a problem for you, your team, or your direct reports, start to assess the severity of the problem by looking at the both the work environment and individual responses to that environment.

## Leadership Insight: The vicious stress cycle

The truth is that we are all conditioned to be stressed, particularly in the U.S., where we come from a Puritan culture that has basically told us, "Have no pleasure. Work all the time."

And we're trained, from the time we go to school to the time we enter the workforce, to get up in the morning, do our classes, do our homework, and really perform, all day long. I have a 17-year-old who starts at 6:30 in the morning, and she goes till 10:30 at night. And she works harder than a lot of people. But this is the way we are conditioned to be.

The problem is that we assume that because we think this is reality that this is the way we're supposed to perform best is to push ourselves to work 80 hours a week, to double- and triple-book, to manage many, many tasks at once. And of course, what happens is, we can't. We fall apart. We get sick. We don't sleep. And it's all a vicious cycle, because the harder you work, the less able you are to perform.

So, by managing your stress, you actually raise your performance level, and you can actually get more done in a day than you would if you simply push yourself.

And for me, this really came home when I had my daughter. She was a little girl, and I was the sole support of my family. And I was managing many too many things at once, and I was working many too many hours a week at once. And I suddenly realized that I was like an oak tree. I was the tree, and I was the roots, and I was the branches, and if I did not take care of my own roots, the whole tree would come down, including my family.

So, if we think of ourselves as really having to take care of our own trees and make sure that the tree is strong and well-nourished and has very good roots, it's a way of understanding that we do need to take care of ourselves and manage our stress.

Working harder and longer is often counterproductive.

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Bronwyn Fryer is a business writer and editor who collaborates with thought leaders to produce influential books, articles, and other publications.

She specializes in organizational behavior, behavioral economics, emotional intelligence, positive psychology, career and talent management, innovation, change management, executive coaching, and high-performance leadership.

While Bronwyn is currently a contributing editor at the Harvard Business Review, she previously spent 10 years as a Senior Editor for the Review. She has worked with hundreds of thought leaders, including behavioral economist Dan Ariely, author of "Predictably Irrational"; and human resources and executive recruiting expert Claudio Fernández-Aráoz, author of "Great People Decisions."

Prior to joining Harvard Business Review, Bronwyn wrote for the New York Times, Newsweek, BusinessWeek, Fortune, and many other publications.

Her academic background is in comparative literature, in which she holds a Bachelor of Arts degree, Master of Arts degrees, and doctorate studies from University of California, Santa Cruz, and University of



California, Berkeley. Bronwyn has also taught world literature, critical thinking, and writing at the university level.

## Activity: Take the stress test

Take this self-assessment to see how big a problem workplace stress is for you. Note that this does not provide a scientific measure of your stress level, but can provide you a helpful look at how much you worry in comparison to others.

Adapted from "How Much of a Worrier Are You?" in *Worry* by Edward M. Hallowell, M.D., New York: Ballantine Books, 1997. Reprinted with permission.

Workplace stress affects even the most productive employees. Answer the following questions to determine your own stress level.

Answer each of the following twenty questions "Not at all," "Sometimes," "Frequently," or "All the time." Record your answers manually as you go.

1. Do you wish you worried less?
2. Do others comment on how much you worry?
3. Do you find that worry clouds your judgment?
4. Do you dwell upon a time or times you were unfairly sued, slandered, unexpectedly fired, downsized, or otherwise victimized by injustice?
5. Do you worry that good friends will turn on you?
6. Do you worry about your health in a way that you know, or others have told you, is excessive or irrational?
7. Do you worry about money more than you really need to?
8. Do you become immobilized by worry?
9. Are you more concerned than you wish you were with what others think of you?
10. Do you develop physical symptoms in response to stress?
11. Do you tend to brood over possible danger rather than doing something about it?
12. In the midst of success, do you find yourself feeling apprehensive, wondering what will go wrong?
13. Are you inhibited and/or shy?
14. How much do you procrastinate?
15. Do you avoid confrontations?
16. Do you find yourself drawn to negative thoughts even when you're otherwise in a good mood?

17. Is it hard for you to shake off criticism, even if you know the criticism is inaccurate?
18. Do you fail to live up to the standards you set for yourself?
19. Do you feel an unmet need for reassurance?
20. Do you lose perspective easily, worrying over some relatively minor matter as if it were a major concern?

The maximum score for this assessment is 60. Tally your score, giving yourself zero points for "Not at all," one point for "Sometimes," two points for "Frequently," and three points for "All the Time." Select your score from the answer options below.

☐ Score range 0-16

It appears that your stress level is low. You are not an excessive worrier. You should review this topic to brush up on ways to keep your stress down, but right now you are in good shape. Keep up the good work!

☐ Score range 17-39

You seem to have a moderate stress level. This is a potential danger zone. Use this course to help you identify the main stressors in your life and set habits that will counteract the negative impact of these stressors.

☐ Score range 40-60

You seem to have a high stress level and may be in the danger zone. This much worry is not good for you physically or emotionally, and can negatively affect your life at work and home. In addition to using some of the strategies covered in this topic, you might also consider consulting a professional.

## Major work stressors

The common causes of stress in the workplace are (1) *changes in the workplace*—precipitating events that set off a cycle of negative stress; (2) *an unhealthy work environment*—ongoing, underlying, and systemic problems in the office; or (3) *individual responses*—anxious reactions to normal or abnormal situations in the workplace. Typically, the negative stress and toxic worry a person experiences can be related to more than one stressor.

## Changes in the workplace

Stressful changes in the workplace include:

- **Change in workload.** If a company reduces the size of its workforce but not its production levels, then employees may be asked to take on additional tasks and increase productivity to make up for the loss of personnel. Or employees may be asked to take on additional responsibility on top of their regular tasks during a period of company expansion. In either case, the extra work may cause both resentment and anxiety.

- **Change in pay.** If an employee receives a reduction in pay (perhaps through a reduction in benefits), this would very likely cause worry about budgeting. But even an increase in pay can cause concern if it puts workers into an increased tax bracket or if they feel that they must perform at a higher level to "earn" the increase.
- **Change of job, assignment, or team.** A new job situation is always a stressful time. Not only does a worker have to learn new skills and processes, but new office or team relationships have to be developed. All this takes extra energy and attention that can become toxic stress, preventing you from doing your best.
- **Change in job security.** In this age of high-tech revolution, large corporation downsizing (which often hits middle management the hardest), expected rapid turnover, and rapidly growing global markets, the threat of losing one's job seems to be more constant.

## Unhealthy work environment

Work environments can feel particularly stressful if employees must contend with:

- **Work overload.** When companies downsize or have trouble finding skilled workers, supervisors often expect their current employees to pitch in and make up the difference in time and labor. Work overload is often the result, adding stress and strain to an already overextended team.
- **Workaholic office culture.** At some high-pressure organizations, the culture demands that employees work long hours and weekends, whether or not the need is real. This culture is marked by intense competition and exhausted workers.
- **Difficult supervisor.** There are managers whose leadership styles simply don't match the professional needs of their direct reports. Some supervisors, for example, believe that pushing their team will increase productivity when the opposite is often the reality—creating a general sense of fear and worry that undermines productivity. Conflict with a difficult supervisor is a major cause of corporate turnover.
- **Negative coworkers.** If an office is filled with an atmosphere of distrust and dissension, the level of stress rises for everyone involved. The causes may be varied—a personality clash, disproportionate workloads, inappropriate or discourteous behavior—but the negative effect is the same.

## Individual responses

Some workplaces can foster anxiety and other negative individual responses. For example:

- **Fear of failure.** If a work environment is one of competition and criticism rather than team building and reinforcement, negative thinking can result, turning external critical messages into internal self-doubt and an increased fear of failure.
- **Low self-esteem.** Closely related to fear of failure, low self-esteem occurs when negative thinking gains control and blocks out or distorts any positive messages. A can't-do attitude is the result.
- **Lack of trust.** A sense of cynicism can pervade a work environment if management claims one set of positive values, such as loyalty and dedication, but then acts in a way that contradicts those values, such as by retooling or downsizing.
- **Loss of collegial community.** Many people feel disconnected at work, left out, forgotten in their cubicles. This sense of isolation is a real problem for self-employed workers, but it's also a growing concern for companies that are connected through computer networks rather than community gathering spaces.
- **Job burnout.** Job burnout is a unique type of stress. It's a serious consequence of the combination of a workaholic culture and toxic stress. You may feel burned out when you feel

trapped in your job, unable to see a future in it. You can't manage to handle routine tasks; you're tired, tense, and irritable; and frankly, you just don't care!

## Signs of dis-stress

Some of the signs of *dis-stress*, that is, stress gone too far, are easily recognized, but many are not. If you can develop an awareness of these signs, you can judge whether you are a normal or a problem worrier. Stress can affect you and your body in four areas: physical, emotional, behavioral, and mental.

**Physical.** Some physical signs of stress include the following:

- Pounding heart
- Elevated blood pressure
- Sweating
- Headache
- Sleep disturbances
- Skin rashes
- Trembling or tics

These reactions may be transitory, but if they persist, then your stress level may be too high for too long a time; this can cause serious harm to your body.

**Emotional.** Some emotional signs of stress include the following:

- Irritability and impatience
- Depression
- Fearfulness
- Low self-esteem
- Envy
- Loss of interest in your job

If you feel as though you aren't in control, that you are vulnerable in your situation, then you may be experiencing some of these characteristic symptoms of the Basic Worry Equation.

**Behavioral.** Some behavioral signs of stress include the following:

- Changes in eating habits (eating too much or too little)
- Drinking more alcohol
- Pacing, restlessness
- Increased smoking
- Teeth grinding and/or nail biting
- Aggressive driving

While nail biting and teeth grinding may not seem to be particularly dangerous habits, they do reflect an inner turmoil. The other symptoms listed are potentially much more disturbing and even dangerous to you and to others around you.

**Mental.** Some mental signs of stress include the following:

- A tendency to forget
- Mind racing or going blank
- Indecisiveness
- Resisting change

- Diminished sense of humor
- Declining productivity

These mental signs of stress suggest a mind that is overwhelmed and unable to function at normal, much less peak, levels. And that's just what toxic worry does; it overwhelms your ability to do the things you want to do and be the person you want to be.

As a supervisor, you may not be able to detect all the signs of stress in your direct reports, but stay alert to the most obvious ones: declining productivity, restlessness, and irritability.

## Levels of stress



Levels of stress can range from healthy responses to dangerous situations all the way to exaggerated and dysfunctional worry about every aspect of life.

Consider your particular situation:

- Does the level of stress in your workplace promote energy and excitement?
- Are there major work stressors affecting your performance or the work of those around you?
- Do you, members of your team, or direct reports show signs of toxic stress?

If stress is a problem for you or for others in your work environment, then it's time to face it and deal with it. There are many ways of improving an unhealthy stress-laden situation. The strategies for dealing with toxic stress in this topic can help most people achieve a healthier stress-performance balance. However, if you or your coworkers or direct reports get stuck, then it is important to recognize the extent of the problem and get further professional help.

## Acceptance or action?



There are always parts of your life that you cannot change—who you are, where you are, and where you've been. For those facts that simply *are*, acceptance is the healthiest path to take.

But for those parts of your life that you *can* change, taking charge by giving yourself the power to change is an exciting prospect. If your stress level is too high, if you worry obsessively, if you are anxious about every little thing, then take a deep breath (that's the first step) and take charge.

As a manager, the same words of wisdom apply. Help your team or direct reports accept the unchangeable elements of the business environment and take charge of what can be changed or reformed.

This section presents an overview of the basic strategies for taking charge.

## Reverse the basic equation of worry

“ If worrying can persecute us, it can also work for us, as self-preparation. No stage fright, no performance. ”  
–Adam Phillips

The basic equation of worry describes a negative process of increasing worry.

Increased vulnerability + Decreased power = Increased worry

Taking charge describes the process of reversing this basic equation: Ease worry by reducing your feeling of vulnerability and bolstering your feeling of power.

Decreased vulnerability + Increased power = Decreased worry

By beginning to take charge, you can decrease your sense of helplessness, increase your power to perceive the problem more clearly and to discover positive actions you need to take to improve the situation or solve the problem, and quickly diminish the worry that was interfering with your ability to function effectively.

## Key Idea: Take the four-step approach

### Key Idea

Decreasing your worry and breaking out of a negative stress cycle isn't easy. You'll need a structure for dealing with stress as it occurs. Consider the following four-step approach:

- **Step 1: Stop.** As soon as you begin to feel stress coming on, say "Stop!" to yourself. For example, your computer freezes just as you're trying to finish your presentation, and you feel that rush of anxiety with failure messages flooding into your mind: "The presentation will fail; I'll fail; I'll be fired." Block those messages before they can be heard by saying, "Stop!" Repeat the message two more times: "Stop!" "Stop!"
- **Step 2: Breathe.** The next step is to breathe. Take a deep breath, filling your diaphragm with air. Hold that breath for eight seconds, and then slowly let the air out. Just as the word "stop" blocks the negative thoughts from your mind, breathing overcomes the stress tendency to hold your breath when under stress. Focusing on breathing helps you to focus on your stress in a different way.

- **Step 3: Reflect.** By interrupting the pattern of stress and giving yourself energy through breathing, you can now focus on the real problem, the cause of the stress. By reflecting on your stress response, you can begin to distinguish the different levels of thought and to sort out rational from irrational stress responses. You can see the practical situation more calmly and realistically and distinguish it from the distortions of your anxiety-influenced thoughts.
- **Step 4: Choose.** Finally, with your attention now on the practical problem itself, you can choose to find real solutions. For example, after rebooting your computer you may discover that very little material was lost, or that even without the lost material, you'll still be able to get the information across to your audience using the old-fashioned method of talking it through. What might have seemed a disaster becomes a manageable problem that you were given the power to solve by identifying your options.

Find yourself stuck in a negative stress cycle? Use this four-step approach to break free.

## Work/life balance

Stress occurs in most working situations, but the often-conflicting demands of work and personal life can be a major source of stress, worry, and anxiety, both at work and at home. Finding a healthy balance between the two can reduce toxic stress and increase productive energy in all aspects of your life. Keep in mind the following:

- Work and personal life need to be complementary, not conflicting.
- Business priorities need to be identified and then balanced with personal concerns.
- "Whole people" are those whose skills and knowledge overlap in work and life beyond.
- Flexible and creative approaches to this balance enhance employee's performance and energy for both work and personal life.

## A systematic approach

You already have the means to change the pattern of escalating worry by using the power of your mind. The systematic **Evaluate-Plan-Remediate** approach allows you to examine the process of worry and break it down into smaller, more manageable problem-units that can be solved or resolved.

For example, suppose you receive a team e-mail from your supervisor about the agenda for an upcoming budget review meeting. In the past, you've always been asked to present the target revenues for your department, but you have yet to be asked this year. You feel a twist in your stomach, a sign that worry is creeping in. Your thoughts begin to speed up: "Why haven't I been asked? Did someone else get the assignment? Did I do a poor job last time? I must be an idiot! Am I being demoted or eased out?" Using the Evaluate-Plan-Remediate worry-intervention method, you can stop the worry as soon as you start to feel it taking over.

1. **Evaluate:** "Yes, I haven't yet been asked to present the projected revenues at the budget review meeting. That's all I know right now."
2. **Plan:** "I need to get information. I should contact my supervisor and ask her directly if she expects me to present this part of the budget."
3. **Remediate:** "I'll call my supervisor and make an appointment to see her in person."



This simple sequence can replace that sense of panic with an immediate evaluation of the situation and a plan for necessary action. If you can make this process a habit every time you feel that twist in your stomach or twinge in your head, you'll turn your worry into action.

## Leadership Insight: Chop goals down to size

One of the big sources of stress is having awfully big goals that are hanging over your head, essentially, but they're bigger than you can complete in a day.

I set these big honking goals for myself often, and I then proceed to stress about them for weeks and weeks and weeks. I'm like, "Oh, my goodness! I have this huge report that I want to write and I have to do research for it." I'll spend half of the day every single day freaking out because I have this giant goal — which, by the way, maybe I'm the one who set. Even if someone else set it, maybe it was a goal that I wanted to adopt.

What I find really reduces stress in those situations is to break down the goal into things that can be accomplished within your mental time horizon. So if you think generally in terms of a day, or some people think in terms of three or four days or a week, set subgoals that fit within that time period.

My goal was, "Oh, my gosh! I've got this huge report that I want to write." What I discovered was I set goals in terms of paragraphs. My goal is to write one paragraph. That's it, just one. I would sit down, write a paragraph and be like, "Yes! I have achieved that goal."

Rather than feeling stressed, I got to feel this sense of completion, and then, "Well, if I can do one paragraph, I'm going to set another goal of doing another paragraph." I did that — got it done and felt a sense of completion.

Now the report that I ended up writing was quite long, but by setting myself goals — a paragraph at a time, and eventually I was able to build up and do a page at a time or a couple of pages at a time — rather than being overwhelmed by this gigantic thing hanging over my head, I was able to just calmly go, "You know what? As long as I can do a paragraph here and then a paragraph there and a paragraph there, I will eventually reach the end of the project."

So to reduce your stress, the stress of having really large goals that you're working toward, break them down into smaller, achievable goals and celebrate each one of the small goals as you achieve it. Rather than being one constant experience of not reaching the big goal, it's one constant experience of reaching small goal after small goal after small goal.

That's the way to take your stress level and instead turn it into a feeling of accomplishment.

By breaking down large goals into smaller, more achievable bits, you can reduce your stress.

**Stever Robbins**  
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Stever Robbins is an entrepreneur, management consultant, and adjunct lecturer at Babson College in building social capital.



A veteran of nine startups, including FTP Software, Intuit, and HEAR Music, he has helped executives navigate their organizations and themselves through building high-growth companies.

He is an expert on personal productivity and writes and hosts the Get-It-Done Guy podcast on personal productivity.

Stever's work with younger and emerging business leaders includes mentoring high-school students through Junior Achievement, serving as career coach and business plan judge at Harvard Business School, and participating in Boston's Principal for a Day program.

He is the author of two business books, "It Takes a Lot More Than Attitude to Lead a Stellar Organization" and "Get-It-Done Guy's 9 Steps to Work Less and Do More."

Stever holds a bachelor's degree from MIT and a Master of Business Administration from Harvard.

## Evaluate

“ Toxic worry is a misreading of reality. ”  
-Edward M. Hallowell, M.D.

The key to evaluating the cause of the worry is to confront it. Don't ignore those little signals your body is giving you. They won't go away until you face what causes them.

**1. Name the problem.** Just giving a name to a problem can help reduce stress because by identifying the specific problem, you've already eliminated all other possibilities. Naming makes things more manageable.

Discover the stress-creating pattern that describes your situation.

For example, do you:

- Take on too many responsibilities?
- Find it difficult to balance work-life issues?
- Work in the wrong job?
- Have problems with colleagues or supervisors?
- Procrastinate when a deadline looms?

**2. Think constructively about the problem.** This may seem like a difficult step, but all it takes is an honest examination of your own automatic worry process. It requires that you step back and watch yourself, in order to identify how your mind leaps from the bad news or perceived danger that triggers the worry to the "awfulizing" of the initial event. Take these steps, one by one:

- **Examine your automatic thoughts.** Monitor your automatic thoughts. What words pop into your mind? Write the words down and look at them more objectively. Often you can see how exaggerated they are. For example, do you use negative descriptors (*idiot, stupid*) against yourself?
- **Correct errors in logic.** Next, examine your automatic thoughts for errors in logic. For example, why would your supervisor include you in the e-mail message about the budget meetings unless

you had a role in that meeting? Your hasty assumption that you were being excluded is an error in logic.

- **Develop alternative hypotheses.** Even though you may leap to the worst-case scenario, there may be other hypotheses that could explain the situation. Your supervisor may have assumed that you were working on the revenue report, or she may have a different task in mind for you.
- **Revise your fundamental assumptions about yourself and your work.** Instead of calling yourself stupid and assuming that the disaster will certainly occur, start becoming your own best supporter. This may prove to be a difficult step to take because these fundamental assumptions can reflect ancient and deep-seated ways of looking at yourself and your world. However, if these assumptions are untrue and block constructive thoughts, then they need to be replaced with healthier and more honest ones. The important thing is to discard the distortions that prevent you from achieving rational and productive solutions.
- **Never worry alone.** Invite a friend to help as a listening partner. Sharing your worries with the right person can make you feel better by unloading the weight of worry. Just talking out loud about your concerns helps to sort them out and to clarify where your concerns may be valid and where you may be distorting the problem. The listener, at this point, needs simply to listen, rather than trying to solve your problems. Your goal here is to understand your own worry process and gain the power to find your own solutions.

## Plan

Planning ahead can take time and seem to be a burden, but the value of planning is a more than adequate return on your time investment. Planning can intercept the toxic worry and replace it with effective action. Here are some steps you can take in advance:

**Get the facts.** Wise worry confronts real problems. Toxic worry exaggerates and misrepresents reality. Brooding about the "what-if" possibilities passively burns up your energy. So get active! Find out what the truth of the matter is. Go to the sources of information, and don't rely on hearsay, gossip, or your own vivid imagination.

**Structure your life.** Much worry results from unstructured living and thinking habits. A cluttered desk with files scattered about means wasted time finding the material you need and the risk of losing important information. In the same way, a mind cluttered with "what-if" possibilities can hide the "that-is" reality. Worried people typically spend more time and energy worrying than they do accomplishing productive tasks.

Structuring your life is being kind and considerate to yourself—organizing your desk helps *you* find things. And structuring your life reduces your risk of losing vital files, information, keys—as well as preventing you from losing perspective. Use structure as an anti-anxiety agent: lists, reminders, schedules, rules, and budgets are all methods of structuring your life for your own benefit.

Here are some ways to structure your *space*:

- Take the time to organize your desk.
- Use colored file folders with clear labels.
- Put your keys in the same spot every day.
- Organize your computer desktop and mailbox.

Here are some ways to structure your *time*:

- Set goals. Decide what you want or need to accomplish in the coming week.
- Prioritize your goals. Break them down into small, manageable activities.

- Use a date book to avoid missing appointments and to stay on target.
- Be fair to yourself: make your plan for the week reasonable.
- Match important activities to the times of your high energy peaks—the times of the day when you feel most alert and vigorous.
- Save the simple, repetitive tasks for your low-energy periods.
- Avoid getting involved in activities that don't match your goals.
- Be sure to take breaks to restore energy—stand up and stretch, take a short walk, or chat briefly with a colleague.

The act of structuring can itself be difficult. If you find the idea of organizing a cause for new worry, then ask a friend or colleague—someone whose desk is neat and who is never late to a meeting—to give you a hand. Ask for help from more than one person—you may discover ideas and ways to structure your life that are actually easy and fun!

## Remediate

The next step is to find a remedy for toxic worry. Reason, planning, and action are powerful antidotes to the paralysis of stress and worry.

- **Take direct action.** If you've evaluated the problem and planned what you can do about it, then go ahead, take the plunge and just do it! Make the phone call, change your behavior, clean up that desk, connect with a friend, or confront that difficult colleague. Taking action is empowering. Your feeling of vulnerability and your toxic worry will fade.
- **Let it go.** *Why let go?* No matter how much you may want to effect a change, there are some problems that can't be solved by any action on your part. You just have to wait and see how things turn out. Worrying about the matter won't help. For example, if your supervisor suddenly announces a major reorganization, you can't do anything about it until the event happens and you have more information about how it will affect you. You just have to sit tight and wait. Or perhaps you're up for a big promotion, but you won't find out about the decision for a month. You will be better off in every way—physically, emotionally, and mentally—if you can let the worry go until later.

*What does letting go mean?* Letting go means giving up your sense of control, and this can be difficult to do. Often people feel that if they worry enough, they might affect the outcome. But in those cases and times when control doesn't help and worry only hurts, it's worth the effort to give up both worry and control.

*How can you let worry go?* Different people have different ways. Some find that meditation helps. Some listen to music or sing a song. Try putting your worry in the palm of your hand and blowing it away. Close your eyes and imagine the worry putting on its coat and hat and walking slowly out of the room. The important thing for you is to say good-bye to useless worry.

## Activity: Evaluate, plan, and remediate

Practice applying the evaluate, plan, and remediate process to help you halt escalating worry.

You've spent six months participating in a cross-functional team charged with completing a project for an important client. You and your supervisor are proud of the work the team has accomplished so far. However, at the last team meeting, the project leader informed everyone

that the client is not pleased with your team's progress. The project leader, who is responsible for all direct communication with the client, also suggested that a major change in direction may be required. A sense of panic has come over you.

How should you evaluate this situation?

- ☐ "I haven't been working on this project hard enough."

**Not the best choice.** This response represents a jump to an unfounded conclusion about your own effectiveness, not an objective evaluation of the situation.

- ☐ "Our team's efforts aren't as well coordinated as they should be."

**Not the best choice.** This response represents a jump to an unfounded conclusion about your team's effectiveness, not an objective evaluation of the situation.

- ☐ "At least one person at the client organization isn't fully satisfied with the work that has been done."

**Correct choice.** In the evaluation phase, you establish what you know, without jumping to a conclusion based on worries or assumptions.

You've determined that at least one person at the client organization isn't fully satisfied with your team's progress on the project.

What plan should you develop to address the situation?

- ☐ "We need more information on why the client is unhappy with the progress on the project. We should solicit more detailed feedback."

**Correct choice.** More information and feedback from the client will help you get the facts about the problem. The facts, in turn, will enable you to generate potential solutions to the problem.

- ☐ "Our team has missed the point somehow. We need to return to our early project plans and reevaluate them."

**Not the best choice.** Reworking your team's early project plans might ultimately prove necessary, but it won't help you find out what the client is unhappy about. Thus, this plan could lead you and your team to address the wrong problem.

- ☐ "I'll have to work harder to make sure this doesn't happen again."

**Not the best choice.** While you should always take responsibility for your own errors, you don't yet know what has made the client unhappy. Therefore, "working harder" may not address the real problem. In addition, "working harder" isn't specific enough to constitute a helpful plan of action.

You've decided the project team needs more information on why the client is unhappy with the direction of the project.

What steps can you take to remediate this situation?

☐ "I'll suggest to the project leader that we arrange a teleconference where we can discuss the problems with the client."

**Correct choice.** This kind of teleconference could help your whole team get more information from the client about the problem and explore potential solutions for moving the project forward.

☐ "I'll contact the client via email myself to see what improvements could be made on the next iteration of the project."

**Not the best choice.** It is the project leader's responsibility to initiate and manage important communications with the client.

☐ "I'll compile a record of all the work I've done on the project, to show I'm not responsible for the client's dissatisfaction."

**Not the best choice.** Compiling such a record to "prove" how hard you have worked will likely only increase your stress level. And it won't help you or your team to get at the root of the client's dissatisfaction.

## Make connections



The Evaluate-Plan-Remediate approach uses reason, logic, and action to confront the exaggerations of toxic worry by increasing the worrier's sense of power and control. Connectedness uses the human need to connect and share with others to reduce the sense of vulnerability. Thus, both approaches help to reverse the Basic Worry Equation.

Connectedness is feeling that you are part of something larger than yourself. In the workplace, it can be feeling that you are part of a company, part of a department, part of a team, working together. Connectedness can also be a sharing with friends, with partners, and in activities you love.

## The disconnected workplace

“Worry gives a small thing a big shadow.”  
–Swedish proverb

As so many of us sit in our cubicles today, separated from our coworkers and yet not quite alone, we can feel disconnected from the people surrounding us. Entrepreneurs or home-office workers can feel even more isolated. We communicate via e-mails, voice mail, and faxes, rarely actually speaking one-on-one to a human voice on the telephone, much less face-to-face. With the ability to access large amounts of information on the Internet, we don't even need to speak to a librarian to get the data or knowledge we need to complete a project.

That sense of disconnectedness can aggravate our anxieties, contribute to worry, and increase stress. We can have a difficult time finding someone to talk to, someone with whom we can test out our concerns in reality checks; share news, ideas, and resources; or just banter about the latest sports or political or company events. The obstacles to connecting that some companies create can seem daunting:

- Treating employees as robots
- Using technical communication instead of human interaction
- Encouraging a competitive desire to hoard information instead of sharing
- Separating employees physically into work cubes
- Overloading employees with extra work

Time, pressure, and competition keep employees hunched over their desks, increasing their stress and ultimately decreasing their productivity.

## Key Idea: Power of connectedness

### Key Idea

While isolation permits toxic worry to escalate, human contact can deflate toxic worry. The human moment—when two people are face-to-face and listening to each other—gives the worrier a chance to unburden himself or herself of those anxieties, a chance to get a reality check from the listener, a chance to be reassured that he or she is not alone facing apparently overwhelming problems.

The human moment, that one-on-one connection between two people, is essential for combating negative stress and distorted worries, but other forms of positive connectedness are also important and powerful antidotes to stress and worry. Everyone in the workplace—individual employees, supervisors, and self-employed workers—needs to strive to increase their own and others' connections to people they trust and to ideas and things they care about.

Isolation often fuels negative stress and worry. However, connecting with friends, family, and coworkers can serve as a powerful antidote.

## Connections foster community

Two kinds of connectedness are vital in the workplace: connectedness to colleagues and connectedness to a mission.

- **Connectedness to colleagues.** This takes effort on your part, but it's worth it. Seek out other members of your department or team, but don't limit yourself to this group. Start by saying hello

—it's as simple as that! Pause at the coffee center to chat about small things. Sit down next to a new person in the lunchroom. Ask people about their work, family, or other interests—usually people are pleased to have someone interested in them.

Individual entrepreneurs and home-office workers can make the effort to get together as a group to form a community and share their experiences—successes and problems, worries and concerns. Weekly or monthly gatherings (even Internet chat rooms) with the express purpose of connection are primarily used as professional networking tools, but they can also fulfill a human need for connectedness.

- **Connectedness to a mission.** On the job, caring about your team's projects or your company's mission can help you feel just as connected as sharing news with a colleague. Feeling as if you are a part of the whole, not just some interchangeable peg, gives you a sense of your own worth. As a supervisor, encouraging this kind of connected spirit will increase your team's productivity. As an employee, caring can help turn negative worry into positive energy.

Together, these two kinds of connectedness can produce a sense of community in the workplace that is essential for the well-being and productivity of all of its members.

## Leadership Insight: Take time to disconnect

When I was promoted for the first time to a leadership position within the Danish government, I became responsible for a very high-profile project, which I had to deliver results on within a very short period of time. It involved a lot of different stakeholders and we had to make a lot of decisions. My team and I worked around the clock. And after six months, I came up in a situation where I was supposed to go on vacation.

This was a vacation I had booked before I got promoted — it was a trip to Cuba, and I've always wanted to go there. So, went to my boss and asked him, "Is it OK if I go, or should I stay?" because I was feeling a lot of responsibility for this project.

I was probably hoping that he should say that I should actually stay. But instead, without any hesitation, he said, "I think you should go, and we'll see how things will work out when you come back." I went — and I probably thought that I would still be able to work, just a little bit, from Cuba.

But I suddenly found out when I got there that there was absolutely no connection to my cell phone and I had only limited access to my e-mail. Instead, I ended up enjoying the trip a lot. When I came back, I found out that the project was running fine and people were happy and motivated. When I logged on to my computer, though, I found 780 emails in my inbox.

But at the same time, my CEO came into the office. He said, "Well, you see the project is running fine, and the e-mails — I think you should just delete them. Because, if they're important, the important ones will come back to you and then you can respond to them. And instead, I think you should go out and talk to the employees. Let them tell you what their experience has been and which decisions that they have made."

This situation gave me a lot food for thought, because before I left, I think I would say that I had been kind of a micromanager involving myself in all of the projects, in all of the decisions. And when I came back, I actually began to relax a lot more.



I found out that if I step back, if I focus on communicating the overall vision and our goals, and give people much more room to maneuver and a lot more responsibility, I'll actually end up not only becoming a more efficient leader myself. I'll end up having a much more efficient team. And, at the end of this project, people were actually talking about how this team was a dream team.

Managers who have a tendency to control everything can learn how not to micromanage, to the benefit of their team and themselves.

### Flemming Pedersen

#### Chief of Division, Danish Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs

Flemming Pedersen is the Chief of Division with the Danish Ministry of Economic and Business Affairs, which conducts economic analyses and suggests policy initiatives for economic growth.

In a previous role as the Chief of the Division for Globalization and Growth Strategy, he led the development of strategies to improve the competitiveness of the Danish companies operating domestically and globally.

Flemming is also a member of the board of directors at the Danish Design Center. He holds a Master of political science from Aarhus University (Denmark) and has formerly worked with the Danish Ministry of Finance and as a consultant for the Boston Consulting Group.

## Quick-fix connections

Long-term positive and trusting relationships may be the best kind of anti-worry connection, but there are times when a person simply needs a quick fix. Quick-fix connections don't solve deeper problems, but they can be very useful for those occasional crises that almost everyone experiences.

**Reassurance as a bandage.** If, for example, two different supervisors ask one employee for two separate reports due on the same day, the employee may feel panicked, overwhelmed by the enormity of the required tasks. The work may seem impossible, and anticipating failure can set off waves of toxic stress. What to do? In this situation, the employee could use some reassurance just to help make it through this tough time.

Reassurance is a type of connectedness that says to the worrier that everything will be fine. It's a kind of comfort that can soothe the anxious mind with a counteracting voice and offer just enough encouragement to help the worrier get over through the difficult time. It's easy to give and warmly received.

- **Getting reassurance.** When you need reassurance, ask for it. That's difficult for some people, but it's worth learning how to do it. Don't make them guess that you need reassurance from your body language or roundabout questions. Just say, "Tell me everything is going to be okay." But even more important, ask the right person. Some people simply can't respond—they may be too distant or too honest. Make sure the person you ask knows when to be reassuring and when to provide their honest opinion.
- **Giving reassurance.** Even though it's easy to give reassurance, it may seem hard. If you've never received it yourself or if you believe a person needs to be "strong" enough to make it through without reassurance or if you believe you always need to be honest about the prospects of



success or failure, then you may resist giving reassurance. You may be pleasantly surprised at how a little reassurance can go a long way toward turning an anxious person into a more productive one. Say the words, "It'll be fine." Give a pat on the back, a little hug, a bit of hope to build some confidence.

The problem with reassurance is that it is just a bandage used to cover a hurt. If it's the only tool used to counteract worry, then it's not enough. Chronic worriers need much more than just reassurance; chronic worriers need to challenge themselves in more systematic and holistic ways.

**Venting as relief.** Another kind of quick-fix connection is venting. If, for example, you have a bad week when everything seems to go wrong—your car breaks down, your assistant quits, your computer gets a virus, your budget request is denied—you can feel overwhelmed and begin to wonder what new catastrophe awaits. The stress of dealing with these real problems can suddenly escalate and interfere with a rational approach to problem-solving. That's when not only reassurance can help, but, in addition, a healthy session of venting.

Venting can offer relief by allowing you to unburden your problems. Just listing them out loud can diminish their power to assault your worried mind. Venting can be good for you!

Be sure to vent to the right person, though. You need someone who will listen and sympathize, not someone who will brush aside your list as unimportant, and not someone who wants to solve everything for you. The purpose of venting is to ease your mind, giving you the mental space to return to the problems with renewed energy to deal with them as needed.

## Self-talk



Connecting with yourself may be one of the most effective strategies for challenging stress and winning. As we grow up and learn about the world around us, we develop automatic thoughts to help us sort through our perceptions and experiences. If these automatic thoughts are healthy and constructive, we cope with our life in positive ways. However, chronic worriers often subject themselves to negative automatic thoughts that contribute to their worry and stress.

## The power of negative thoughts

Negative self-talk, what you say to yourself, contributes directly to your stress. Self-talk is related to your internal assumptions and beliefs, and it is typically automatic, familiar, and unconscious.

- Our bodies can't sort out the experiences we have from the events we imagine. As we imagine a bad outcome—say, being fired from our job—our body reacts to the thought as though it were

actually happening. All the physical reactions that would occur in a dangerous situation will occur in an imagined one too.

- We talk to ourselves constantly, and if those messages are negative-critical ("How could I do such a foolish thing!") or name-calling ("I'm an idiot!")—then we start to believe them.
- We rarely stop to consider what we are saying to ourselves. We don't counter the criticisms, for example, with understanding or forgiveness. In other words, we don't test our own assumptions. Because we don't counter negative thoughts—such as, "I know I won't get that raise"—those thoughts can become self-fulfilling.

## Tune in to your self-talk

To accurately tune into your negative self-talk, you must first identify your automatic thoughts. These are thoughts that you have spontaneously that may or may not reflect the reality of your situation.

Think about what you tell yourself when you first arrive at the office in the morning. Is the message positive or negative? Is there a familiar feel to the message? For example, do you see your desk and think, "I'll never get everything done today?" Is the message accurate? Could you be distorting or exaggerating the situation?

## Identify common mind traps

Automatic thoughts often fall into categories, called mind traps. These mind traps are irrational beliefs that can lead you astray from a clear and realistic perception of your world. Identifying the ones you use and are comfortable with will help you challenge them.

Consider how your automatic thinking might fall into the following traps:

Mind Traps	What They Are
"Should" statements	"I should do this. I must do that." You motivate yourself with "shoulds" and then feel guilty.
All-or-nothing thinking	"One mistake, and total failure will result." You see things in extremes of black or white, all good or all bad.
Overgeneralizations	"This always happens." You set a pattern of inevitability to an event that happens once or twice.

Mental filtering	"This one mistake ruins everything." You see only the negative side to an event and ignore the positive one.
Rejecting positive experiences	"The team complimented my work just to be polite." You accept only the negative messages.
Jumping to conclusions	"Our department is being restructured. I know I'll be fired." Without bothering to get the facts, you assume the worst.
Emotional reasoning	"I feel like a loser, so I must be a loser." You assume your negative feelings represent reality.
Labeling	"I'm so stupid and irresponsible to be late for that meeting!" You label yourself negatively.
Personalizing	"The proposal was rejected because I was on the team." You assign cause and blame to yourself inappropriately.

## Challenge self-talk distortions

Once you are able to identify the mind traps that you easily fall into, begin to challenge them, one by one. The following table offers possible remedies for common mind traps:

Mind Traps	Remedies
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"Should" statements	Use the verb "want" instead of "should." Give yourself some flexibility in deciding what you want to do.
All-or-nothing thinking	Don't make black-or-white judgments. Think of the in-between points or percentages (40% or 75%).
Overgeneralizations	Examine the evidence. Is something always true? Or has it happened two times out of the past five?
Mental filtering	Look for the positive side as well as the negative. Focus on solving the problem.
Rejecting positive experiences	Acknowledge and accept the reality of positive experiences or events.
Jumping to conclusions	Get the facts first. See if the evidence supports your conclusion.
Emotional reasoning	Step away from just your emotions, and try to look at yourself as others see you.
Labeling	Describe the behavior, not yourself. If you make a mistake, acknowledge the mistake; don't blame yourself.

Personalizing	Make yourself prove that you are responsible for the situation. What is the evidence?
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## Choose positive self-talk

Choosing positive self-talk over existing mind traps isn't easy. However, adopting a positive outlook is critical to avoiding workplace stress. To reprogram your self-talk, start slowly. Consider how you can:

- **Reframe the way you perceive events.** Reframing is a way of restating negative self-talk into positive affirmation. It puts the picture or experience into a different frame, so that you can look at it in a new way. Consider the worst-case scenario of a given situation. For example, what if you do get fired after a merger. What would happen to you? What new opportunities might emerge from that event? In other words, look at a situation from as many different views as possible. What can you learn about it? A situation that might seem disastrous could offer exciting new opportunities. What seems like a terrible mistake may be a great chance to learn.
- **Affirm yourself.** Give yourself reassurance and support. Positive and constructive self-talking takes practice; at first, it may seem uncomfortable. But keep on using it. Tell yourself that you're fine, that you'll make it, and that you deserve that raise. Give yourself credit when it's due. The positive alternatives will gain strength because they actually make more sense.

## Activity: Make your talk positive

Making your self-talk positive is an important part of managing workplace stress. Find a positive version of each of the following comments.

Making your self-talk positive is an important part of managing workplace stress. Find a positive version of each of the following comments.

"I can't believe I screwed up this report again."

- ☐ "Someone else should handle these reports."

**Not the best choice.** This comment still essentially surrenders to your negative self-talk. Rather than seeking improvement, this language suggests that you are seeking to unload problems on someone else.

- ☐ "I need to find out what I'm doing wrong on these reports."

**Correct choice.** This response acknowledges the issue at the basis of your self-talk. However, it replaces the negativity of the original comment with a positive impulse toward improvement.

- ☐ "So what if I'm not good with these reports? I can do other things."

**Not the best choice.** Avoiding negative self-talk doesn't mean you should stop working on tasks that are sometimes difficult and frustrating. Learning to perform difficult tasks

can strengthen your on-the-job performance.

"My customers all hate me."

- ☐ "I think my people skills need some work."

**Correct choice.** This response acknowledges the issue at the basis of your self-talk. However, it replaces the negativity of the original comment with a positive impulse toward improvement.

- ☐ "I wish I was more like Chuck. That guy can charm anyone. Ah, well."

**Not the best choice.** Although this comment at least implies a positive role model, it does not suggest any effort to learn from that role model or make improvements.

- ☐ "Maybe I need to try a job where I don't have to deal with people."

**Not the best choice.** This comment suggests giving up, rather than making an improvement.

"My supervisors never notice me."

- ☐ "My supervisors are probably too busy to be concerned with me."

**Not the best choice.** This comment misses the opportunity to seek more information or make an improvement. It's a form of giving up.

- ☐ "I'm glad I'm not one of those people who's always talking about their latest accomplishment."

**Not the best choice.** Replacing negativity toward yourself with negativity towards others does not decrease your stress level—it just directs your stress in a different direction.

- ☐ "Maybe I need to keep my supervisors more up-to-speed on my activities."

**Correct choice.** This response acknowledges the issue at the basis of your self-talk. However, it replaces the negativity of the original comment with a positive impulse toward improvement.

## Stress's effects on the body



There are times when no matter how much you evaluate, plan, and remediate, no matter how connected you become to others and to your own feelings, you may still be burdened by those real situations that deserve your attention and concern. Or you may just still feel those waves of anxiety and stress in spite of how thoughtful, analytical, or connected you may be. One important way to manage your stress, whatever its source, is to exercise your body. Changing your physical state can help change your mental state.

After all, stress has a direct impact on your body. In the short term, it gives you that energy surge and alertness you need to confront a threatening situation. However, prolonged stress puts an unhealthy strain on your body. Prolonged stress can:

- Raise your cholesterol level
- Cause your arteries to restrict, limiting blood flow to the heart
- Disrupt your digestive process and result in stomach acid, constipation, diarrhea, ulcers, or even cancer of the bowels
- Stimulate migraine headaches, asthma attacks, or other allergic reactions

Even if you can't eliminate the stress-causing situation, you can choose to reduce the effect stress has on your body. You can exercise, eat healthy foods, get enough rest, and relax and breathe deeply.

## Exercise, exercise, exercise

The easiest, cheapest, and most natural antidote to worry is exercise. Exercise benefits your brain by:

- Reducing tension
- Easing aggression and frustration
- Providing an increased sense of well-being
- Improving sleep
- Aiding concentration

Exercise is also good for almost every other part of your body—heart, circulation, bones, respiratory system, skin, etc. And it helps you reduce your weight, lower your blood pressure, and regulate your blood sugar.

Worry tends to put your body in a frozen, unmoving state. Exercise helps you break out of the immobility. So start by simply moving. Rock and sway. Get up and stretch. Even better, take a walk or climb some stairs. Even those brief physical efforts can help clear your mind of the weight of worry.

Better yet, get in the habit of exercising on a regular basis—three to four times a week, if possible. Choose something you enjoy doing—walking, running, bicycling, roller-blading, hiking, swimming, rowing, playing tennis or basketball. If you don't enjoy it, you won't keep it up.

## Eat healthfully

Eating is another way of coping with stress. If you turn to consuming junk food as a response to a stressful day, then food has become a negative coping response for you. But if you eat a healthy and varied diet, then your body will be better able to deal with the normal or higher levels of stress you face each day.

Some ways to achieve healthy eating habits include:

- **Maintaining a healthy weight.** Toxic stress can affect your weight by causing you to under- or overeat. Either way, your body won't have the optimum level of energy it needs to function effectively. First, determine the healthiest body weight for you, taking into account that this number varies by height, gender, and age. Then, if you do need to adjust your body weight, choose a slow, steady weight-loss or -gain diet.
- **Eating a variety of food.** Not only is it more interesting to vary your diet, but you give your body the full range of nutrients it needs.
- **Eating plenty of vegetables, fruit, and grains.**
- **Reducing the level of fat and cholesterol in your diet.** Eat foods that are broiled, baked, or steamed rather than fried. Limit your intake of animal products such as egg yolks.
- **Using sugar, salt, and sodium in moderation.**
- **Moderating your consumption of alcohol and caffeine.**

## Sleep restfully

“ There is more to life than just increasing its speed. ”  
–Mahatma Gandhi

Insomnia can be caused by stress, and lack of sleep can aggravate the level of stress. This can cause you to become more tense, irritable, and anxious. People vary in the amount of sleep they need, but your body will tell you what's right for you. Pay attention to how you feel in the morning after more or less sleep. Then make an effort to get the amount of sleep that's right for you. If you are having problems sleeping, then try some of these simple sleep-improving activities:

- Reduce your intake of coffee, other caffeinated drinks, and alcohol. These substances tend to disrupt your sleep.
- Exercise regularly.
- Plan the next day's activities early in the evening.
- Prepare for your morning routine before you go to bed.
- Make your sleeping environment as quiet and dark as possible.
- Establish a routine for going to sleep.
- Use relaxation techniques to help yourself fall asleep.
- If you can't sleep, get out of bed and do something soothing until you feel sleepy again.

## Relax and breathe: the relaxation response





The relaxation response is a structured approach to using breathing and relaxation to counter the negative affects of stress. It is a deliberate and controlled technique that is opposite to the body's natural fight-or-flight stress response in the face of apparent danger or a perceived threatening situation. While the body's fight-or-flight mode causes an increase in the heart rate and breathing, the relaxation response reverses these bodily states.

When you find yourself feeling unnecessary stress, apply this simple technique to counteract the negative effects of stress on your body. To prepare, you will need:

- **A quiet environment.** Find a quiet, calm place; a private room; or a space with no distractions.
- **A mental device.** Choose a constant stimulus of a single-syllable sound or word, such as the word, "one." Repeat that sound silently or softly over and over again. Focus solely on that sound.
- **A passive attitude.** Disregard all distracting thoughts. Simply let yourself be completely passive.
- **A comfortable position.** Sit in a comfortable chair, preferably with neck and head support. Loosen all tight-fitting clothes. Prop your feet up, if possible.

To induce the relaxation response:

1. **Sit in a comfortable position.**
2. **Close your eyes.**
3. **Deeply relax your muscles, starting with your toes and moving up to your face and head.**
4. **Breathe through your nose.** As you breathe out, say the sound or word you have chosen silently or softly to yourself. Breathe in. Breathe out and say the word again. Breathe in.
5. **Keep repeating the breathing in and out and the sound for 20 minutes.** Open your eyes to check the time, but do not use an alarm or other sharp noise.
6. **When you finish, sit quietly for several minutes, at first with your eyes closed and then with your eyes open.**

After using this technique, most people feel calm and relaxed, but perhaps the most important benefit is an immediate lowering of blood pressure. And the interruption of stressful and worried thoughts can enable you to focus more clearly on the real situation.

## Key Idea: Avoid stress stimulants

### Key Idea

Stress stimulants surround us in our busy, modern world. Try to avoid those superficial stress arousers and focus on only those matters that are truly important.

- **Shun negative office politics and workplace conflicts.** Intra- and interdepartmental rivalries can create an artificial sense of competition and crisis. Genuine teamwork and shared activities create a more effective and productive environment. If you have the power to move your colleagues away from conflict and toward a connected community, then you will be helping not only yourself but the organization as well.
- **Limit excessive media stimulants.** Too much Internet time can aggravate tension by its flashing advertisements, overly busy pages, frustratingly slow downloads, and startling pop-up menus. Skip over exaggerated disaster news stories; one of their purposes is to arouse your level of worry. Avoid watching too much television—it's another source of extraneous information and pressure.
- **Restrict your intake of coffee, caffeine, alcohol, and sugar.** They may seem to help give you what you want at the moment—whether it's being alert with caffeine, or gaining a quick energy pick-me-up with sugar, or relaxing with an alcoholic drink—but these effects are all superficial. Overuse can produce the opposite effect.

Stress stimulants are all around us. What should you avoid to keep your stress level manageable?

## Adopt stress busters



Incorporate stress busters into your everyday routine to help you deal with those moments when your body tenses up at the thought of another long budget meeting, at the message you received from your supervisor to see him immediately, or at the workaholic's announcement that she worked all weekend. Stress busters can become easy and natural ways to help you endure those anxious moments and enjoy your life and work.

**Try "minis."** Minis are shorter versions of the relaxation response technique that you can use quickly whenever you feel tension beginning to grip you. Taking the following actions will help to reduce stress if you don't have a lot of time:

- Take a deep breath and hold it for several seconds. Then let your breath out very slowly while repeating your focus word.
- Put your right hand just under your navel. Focus on breathing down to your navel. As you breathe in the first time, say the number *ten*. Breathe out. Then breathe in and say the number *nine*. Breathe out. Continue until you reach *zero*.
- Breathe in through your nose and breathe out through your mouth ten times. Notice how cool the air feels when you inhale and how warm it is when you exhale.
- Imagine air as a cloud. As you breathe, envision that the air comes to you as a cloud, filling you and then leaving you.

**Enjoy humor.** Just laughing can transform that rigidly tight facial expression of tension into more relaxed and flexible features. Humor is also a way to reframe negative self-talk into something more positive and fun.

Step back from the worry and strain of the job, and look for the funny side of things:

- Find the humor in everyday situations. Watch out for coincidences, ironies, and contradictions.
- Think about playing at your work. Many routine tasks can be seen as game-playing moves.
- Collect cartoons to decorate your workspace.
- Exaggerate something to the point of absurdity. Step out of your usual bounds, or say the unexpected occasionally.
- Take your standard negative self-talk lines, and rephrase them into funny talk. For example, change "This always happens to me" to "And I only volunteer 60% of the time!"

*A note of caution:* Don't mistake humor for ridicule. Laughing at someone or at the expense of someone is not nearly as funny as it is hurtful. Real humor is based on respect and involves everyone in the fun.

**Take a break.** Our bodies and minds need time-outs, breaks from our work and activities. Pay attention to your stress and energy levels. When you feel tension rising and energy falling, then take a break. Some stress-reducing changes in your work pattern include:

- Listening to music
- Going for a walk
- Chatting with friends
- Climbing some stairs

These are brief, daily breaks. But be sure to schedule longer breaks with an extended weekend or short getaways as well. Ride out into the country; stay in a bed-and-breakfast; go hiking or fishing, or simply read a good book. A complete and longer change of pace can help you perceive your work world in a whole new way—with less worry and more energy.

All of these activities can serve to reduce stress and restore energy. Moments of leisure, relaxation, and pleasure mean less worry and dis-stress.

## Activity: Keep a body healthy

Stress stimulants and stress busters sometimes aren't as easy to distinguish as you'd think. See if you can spot the stress stimulants in an office.

Stress stimulants and stress busters sometimes aren't as easy to distinguish as you'd think. See if you can spot the stress stimulants in an office.

Is coffee a potential stress stimulant?

☐ Yes

**Correct choice.** Many people like to start their day with a cup of coffee. However, coffee is a stimulant, and drinking too much of it when you are already stressed can make you jumpy and nervous. Enjoy it in moderation and avoid using it as an "energy booster."

☐ No

**Not the best choice.** Many people like to start their day with a cup of coffee. However, coffee is a stimulant, and drinking too much of it when you are already stressed can make you jumpy and nervous. Enjoy it in moderation and avoid using it as an "energy booster."

Is a hamburger a potential stress stimulant?

☐ Yes

**Correct choice.** When work gets really busy, a lot of people fall back on a diet of fast food. Avoid this. High stress already puts a burden on your digestive and circulatory systems. Adding fat-laden, high calorie foods will only negatively impact your overall health.

☐ No

**Not the best choice.** When work gets really busy, a lot of people fall back on a diet of fast food. Avoid this. High stress already puts a burden on your digestive and circulatory systems. Adding fat-laden, high calorie foods will only negatively impact your overall health.

Are hand weights a potential stress stimulant?

☐ Yes

**Not the best choice.** While you don't want to turn your office into a gym, simple pieces of exercise equipment that can be used for 5- to 10-minute sessions (e.g., an exercise ball or hand weights) may let you work off frustration and build positive energy.

☐ No

**Correct choice.** While you don't want to turn your office into a gym, simple pieces of exercise equipment that can be used for 5- to 10-minute sessions (e.g., an exercise ball or hand weights) may let you work off frustration and build positive energy.

Is a radio a potential stress stimulant?

☐ Yes

**Not the best choice.** Tuning in to your favorite music station for a few minutes at work can give your mind a well-deserved break from your daily activities, and may help to boost your energy level. Additionally, listening to soothing music at a reasonable volume may help ease your stress without taking your focus off your work.

☐ No

**Correct choice.** Tuning in to your favorite music station for a few minutes at work can give your mind a well-deserved break from your daily activities, and may help to boost

your energy level. Additionally, listening to soothing music at a reasonable volume may help ease your stress without taking your focus off your work.

Are phones potential stress stimulants?

☐ Yes

**Correct choice.** In the business world, information comes from a lot of sources: e-mail, phones, PDAs, memos, etc. Having to juggle all these sources is a major source of stress, especially if many are bringing bad news. Try, if possible, not to give attention to all these sources of input at once. Turn off your phone when and if you can.

☐ No

**Not the best choice.** In the business world, information comes from a lot of sources: e-mail, phones, PDAs, memos, etc. Having to juggle all these sources is a major source of stress, especially if many are bringing bad news. Try, if possible, not to give attention to all these sources of input at once. Turn off your phone when and if you can.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**How common are stress-related problems at work?**

Extremely common. With heavy workloads, career pressure, and demands for increased productivity in almost all areas of the workplace, stress is a constant factor in our professional lives. Some stress is good—it gets people going—but too much can have the opposite effect. Excessive stress is repetitive and frustrating with no reward and no satisfaction, and it can become toxic—doing real damage to your mind and body.

**Don't I have to be stressed to succeed in today's professional environment?**

To a degree, yes. Stress does stimulate performance. Some people thrive in a demanding, high-stress world. They are energized by the fast-paced working style, the demands of multi-tasking, and the excitement of stiff competition. But most managers can't keep up that pace for long without physical and emotional consequences. The most successful managers tend to be those who prioritize their tasks, delegate responsibilities, and know when to leave their work problems behind them.

**How can I tell whether my worry is productive or toxic?**

It's important to tell the difference between positive stress and toxic worry. If you feel good about what you're doing, if you're producing excellent work on time and under budget, then enjoy yourself! But if you're worried and anxious, unable to concentrate on your work, or unhappy about even going to work, then the stress you feel is poisoning your life—at work and at home.

**What are some of the signs of toxic stress?**

Some signs of toxic stress are subtle and difficult to detect while others are clearly recognizable. The most common indicators are changes in behavior such as: decreased productivity, creativity, motivation, or confidence; increased irritability, fatigue, or pessimism; increased use of alcohol or other drugs; and increased physical ailments with no apparent cause. In practical terms, you may be dealing with a toxic level of stress if you find yourself canceling appointments, failing in an interview, or refusing to fly on an airplane just because you're too anxious.

### Why is it important to talk with someone about the problem?

One of the first rules for managing stress is *never worry alone*. Talk with someone you trust. Why? Talking helps you feel more in control because it lets you know you're not alone—you're sharing the burden with another person. Your talking partner can ease your mind by reassuring you that you're okay or that the problem can be solved. He may also help you reflect on the situation and get the facts straight. When you're stressed, you tend to exaggerate the situation, making it worse in your mind. A talking partner can offer a different point of view—a different way of seeing the situation.

### How do deep-breathing exercises help manage stressful moments?

Deep breathing can help in several ways. First, the very act of taking a deep breath helps you relax—it slows the heart rate and the respiratory rate, and keeps the pH level of the blood stable. Just *noticing* your breathing takes your mind off the problem and puts it onto your body. Also, many people tend to hold their breath when stressed—deep breathing forces them to get oxygen back into their system.

## Overview

This section provides interactive exercises so you can practice what you've learned. These exercises are self-checks only; your answers will not be used to evaluate your performance in the topic.

### Scenario

Assume the role of a manager in a fictional situation and explore different outcomes based on your choices (5-10 minutes).

### Check Your Knowledge

Assess your understanding of key points by completing a 10-question quiz (10 minutes).

## Scenario: Part 1

### Part 1

Ian is a finance manager at ProCore, which was recently acquired—a huge surprise to all. The future is unclear, stock is down, and everyone is anxious. Stress is in the air. Every morning, when Ian arrives at ProCore, his heart starts pounding as he worries about what might happen during the day ahead.

Ian's pounding heart isn't his only symptom of stress. He has grown increasingly irritable at work, and his mind has gone blank during several emotionally charged meetings. He's even begun isolating himself in his office—something he realizes is not helpful in his managerial role. Ian knows he must do something about his stress level—but he's not sure where to begin.

How might Ian begin taking charge of his situation?

- Eliminate the emotionally charged meetings and any other sources of workplace stress that he can

**Not the best choice.**

The key to managing workplace stress isn't removing sources of anxiety and worry entirely. Stress is a fact of life. Eliminating all its sources simply isn't possible. Ian needs to develop a healthier response to unavoidable stress.

A certain amount of stress can be healthy and invigorating. Rather than trying to eliminate stress, Ian should strive to turn unhealthy worrying into positive energy. That way, he can remain productive even during stressful times.

- Accept that anxiety is natural in times of change, and realize that the stress will subside once things calm down

**Not the best choice.**

Trying to ignore unhealthy stress can have serious consequences. Prolonged stress can actually make individuals physically ill. For a company, stress can decrease productivity and increase absenteeism and employee turnover. Finally, ongoing stress can damage relationships, both at work and at home. Taking steps to *manage* stress is therefore crucial.

- Acknowledge that working will always involve stress in some form, and find healthier ways to respond

**Correct choice.**

Ian can't hope to eliminate all sources of stress from work. But he *can* improve the way he *reacts* to stress—by understanding how he feels vulnerable and understanding what power he does have to combat problems.

In fact, stress increases whenever people feel both vulnerable *and* powerless to control their situation. You can reduce the "stress equation" to simple terms: Vulnerability + Powerlessness = Stress. By decreasing feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness, you can reduce stress.

## Scenario: Part 2

### Part 2



ProCore recognizes the tension in the air, and Human Resources holds a seminar on stress management. Ian picks up some tips on how to manage stress. He learns that if he decreases his feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness, his anxiety and worry will also diminish—no matter how stressful things get at ProCore. Human Resources presents this as a "Worry Equation": Increased Vulnerability + Decreased Power = Increased worry.

Ian soon has an opportunity to practice exercising more power over his situation. One morning, he overhears a colleague talking about presenting reports at an upcoming meeting. They are reports that *Ian* usually presents. He wonders whether he did a poor job presenting the reports last time—and worries that his supervisor has asked someone else to present them this time because she wasn't satisfied with his presentation.

What should Ian do first to manage his stress?

- Evaluate what's actually happening, not what might be happening

**Correct choice.**

Evaluation is the first step for turning worry into action. By evaluating what's *actually* happening—rather than obsessing about what *might* be happening—Ian names the problem and can begin to think more constructively about it. Just giving a name to a problem can help reduce stress. Identifying the specific problem eliminates all other possibilities. The next step is to make a *plan* for gathering more information. And the final step is to take *action*. These three steps can help reduce the hold that hearsay and imagination can have—turning unhealthy worry into "wise worry."

- Think back to the last time he presented the reports, and identify possible weaknesses

**Not the best choice.**

Obsessing over possible flaws in his last presentation will only make Ian feel even more powerless, because he can't change the past. His stress will only increase. To turn unhealthy worry into "wise worry," Ian needs to *evaluate* what's actually going on, and then make a *plan* to gather more information. Thinking constructively about a problem and planning what to do, can intercept toxic worry and replace it with effective *action*. These three steps, called the Evaluate-Plan-Remediate approach, help reduce feelings of powerlessness, easing anxiety and stress.

- Directly consult the colleague about what he overheard

**Not the best choice.**

Since Ian is most worried about his supervisor's assessment of his performance, he should consult *her* rather than the colleague. However, he should do so only after he evaluates the situation and makes a plan for gathering more information about what's



going on. Taking action—such as meeting with his supervisor—is empowering. By following these three steps in the Evaluate-Plan-Remediate approach, Ian can reduce his feelings of powerlessness and ease his anxiety.

## Scenario: Part 3

### Part 3

Ian meets with his supervisor to find out if she expects him to present the usual reports at the next meeting. Surprised by his question, she answers, "Of course!" When he tells her what he overheard, she says, "Oh, he's talking about a possible new *format* for the printed reports. You'll be presenting the usual analysis." Ian walks away feeling relieved.

By using the Evaluate-Plan-Remediate approach in specific situations, Ian has begun decreasing his sense of *powerlessness*. He has changed one part of the "worry equation." But to manage stress, Ian also needs to decrease his feelings of *vulnerability*—the other part of the equation.

Which would be an effective way for Ian to reduce feelings of vulnerability?

- Ask his boss whether she thinks the company is going to survive this time of volatile change and if his future is in question

#### Not the best choice.

Seeking reassurance from his supervisor can serve as a stress-management "quick fix" by soothing Ian's anxious thoughts temporarily. However, Ian shouldn't rely solely on reassurance to reduce his feelings of vulnerability. He also needs a more systematic way of managing this part of the stress equation.

- Systematically schedule lunches and other social interaction with members of his department, as well as with people from other departments

#### Good choice.

Connecting with colleagues is actually a powerful antidote to stress and worry, because it eases feelings of isolation and vulnerability. By interacting with others, Ian can conduct "reality checks" on his concerns, as well as share news, ideas, and resources. He may discover he's not alone in his struggle to manage stress.

- Remind himself that he has consistently done a good job and that his supervisor has given him positive performance reviews

**Good choice.**

When people are stressed, they tend to engage in negative self-talk—such as overgeneralizing or blaming themselves inappropriately for problems. By replacing such thought patterns with more positive self-talk, Ian can reframe the way he perceives stressful events and reduce his feelings of vulnerability—a major contributor to unhealthy worry.

## Scenario: Conclusion

**Conclusion**

Ian has made major strides in managing his stress level. He realizes that he can't eliminate stress from his work life—but that he *can* control how he *responds* to stress.

Ian used the Evaluate-Plan-Remediate process to decrease feelings of powerlessness. Then he connected with colleagues to decrease his feelings of vulnerability. By reducing feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability, the two factors that produce stress, Ian reversed the cycle of unhealthy worry.

Though times are still tough at ProCore, Ian now comes to work with more energy and optimism—and with tools to manage stress.

## Activity: Check Your Knowledge: Question 1

Is the following statement true or false? All stress and worry should be avoided.

- True

**Not the best choice.**

This statement is actually false. All stress and worry should *not* be avoided; some stress is actually good because it can provide you with the extra energy you need to deal with challenging situations. To the extent that stress and worry help you prepare for difficult times, you can benefit from it.

- False

**Correct choice.**

Some stress is actually good because it can provide you with the extra energy you need to deal with challenging situations. To the extent that stress and worry help you prepare for difficult times, you can benefit from it.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 2

Some of the most common sources of stress in the workplace are:

- Physical illness

**Not the best choice.**

Though physical illness can contribute to stress, it is not among the most common sources of stress in the workplace. Instead, changes in the workplace (whether positive or negative) as well as an unhealthy work environment (marked by conflict or confusing expectations) are the more common direct causes of stress in the workplace.

- Changes in the workplace and an unhealthy work environment

**Correct choice.**

One common source of stress in the workplace is change—whether positive (such as a new assignment) or negative (such an increase in workload). Another major source of stress is an unhealthy work environment marked by interpersonal conflicts or confusing expectations.

- Concerns about home life affecting work

**Not the best choice.**

Though concerns about home life's impact on work can contribute to stress, it is not among the most common sources of stress in the workplace. Instead, changes in the workplace (whether positive or negative) as well as an unhealthy work environment (marked by conflict or confusing expectations) are the more common direct causes of stress in the workplace.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 3

The four steps used to break out of the negative stress cycle are:

- Breathe. Reflect. Choose. Act.

**Not the best choice.**

These actions are all helpful, but the important step of Stop is missing. Stopping your negative thoughts and reactions to a difficult situation is the first response needed to break the negative stress cycle. When you stop, you block the negative messages you're giving yourself. When you breathe, you calm your body down. Then you can reflect on the problem and choose the best action to take.

- Consult friends. Relax. Get a massage. Take a walk.

**Not the best choice.**

These actions are all helpful, but they're not the four steps used to break out of the negative stress cycle. The steps are Stop, Breathe, Reflect, and Choose. When you stop, you block the

negative messages you're giving yourself. When you breathe, you calm your body down. Then you can reflect on the problem and choose the best action to take.

- **Stop. Breathe. Reflect. Choose.**

**Correct choice.**

These four steps are effective in breaking the negative stress cycle. When you stop, you block the negative messages you're giving yourself. When you breathe, you calm your body down. Then you can reflect on the problem and choose the best action to take.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 4

In what ways can connectedness help reduce stress?

- **Connecting with solutions can reduce stressful situations.**

**Not the best choice.**

Exploring solutions can help you reduce stress in some situations, but connecting with trusted people can help in all stressful situations. Why? Trusted individuals can listen to you and help you see a stressful situation in a different light. Remember the first rule in taking charge of worry and stress: Never worry alone!

- **Connections with trusted people, particularly colleagues, can provide you with reassurance, and can help you gain perspective and perhaps new ideas for solutions.**

**Correct choice.**

Connections with trusted people are the most powerful antidote to stress, because those individuals can listen to you and help you see a stressful situation in a different light. Remember the first rule in taking charge of worry and stress: Never worry alone!

- **Offices that are technologically connected help reduce the stress of dealing with outdated networks or a lack of networks.**

**Not the best choice.**

Technology can help you reduce stress in some situations, but connecting with trusted people can help in all stressful situations. Why? Trusted individuals can listen to you and help you see a stressful situation in a different light. Remember the first rule in taking charge of worry and stress: Never worry alone!

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 5

Is the following statement true or false? Chronic worriers often subject themselves to negative automatic thoughts that contribute to their worry and stress.

- True

**Correct choice.**

Chronic worriers tend to make their problems worse by listening to their own negative automatic thoughts instead of looking at the actual situation. To combat chronic worrying, you can reshape such negative self-talk into more positive and healthy messages.

- False

**Not the best choice.**

This statement is actually true. Chronic worriers do tend to make their problems worse by listening to their own negative automatic thoughts instead of looking at the actual situation. To combat chronic worrying, you can reshape such negative self-talk into more positive and healthy messages.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 6

Which of the following is the easiest and least expensive antidote to worry?

- Exercising

**Correct choice.**

Exercise helps you break out of the physical immobility that stress often causes. Even brief physical efforts, such as standing up and stretching, can clear your mind of the weight of worry. Exercise reduces tension, eases aggression and frustration, increases your sense of well-being, improves sleep, and aids concentration.

- Eating healthfully

**Not the best choice.**

Though eating healthfully is a good idea, for many people it's not the easiest and least expensive antidote to worry. Instead, exercise meets all these criteria. Exercise helps you break out of the physical immobility that stress often causes. Even brief physical efforts, such as standing up and stretching, can clear your mind of the weight of worry. Exercise reduces tension, eases aggression and frustration, increases your sense of well-being, improves sleep, and aids concentration.

- Taking week-long vacations for travel to new destinations

**Not the best choice.**

Though taking any type of break is a good idea, travel to new places is not the easiest and least expensive antidote to worry. Instead, exercise meets these criteria. Exercise helps you break out of the physical immobility that stress often causes. Even brief physical efforts, such as standing up and stretching, can clear your mind of the weight of worry. Exercise reduces tension, eases aggression and frustration, increases your sense of well-being, improves sleep, and aids concentration.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 7

What do you need to prepare for the relaxation response?

- A dark room, a bed or cot, and soft music

**Not the best choice.**

You actually don't need these things to prepare for the relaxation response. All you really need is a quiet environment where you can focus on relaxing. Then you find a comfortable position, concentrate on a single mental image, and push away distracting thoughts.

- A spiritual guide

**Not the best choice.**

You actually don't need a spiritual guide to prepare for the relaxation response. All you really need is a quiet environment where you can focus on relaxing. Then you find a comfortable position, concentrate on a single mental image, and push away distracting thoughts.

- A quiet place, a quiet mind, and a comfortable position

**Correct choice.**

You don't need much to prepare for the relaxation response. All you really need is a quiet environment where you can focus on relaxing. Then you find a comfortable position, concentrate on a single mental image, and push away distracting thoughts.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 8

Which of the following activities can be used as stress busters?

- Playing video games

**Not the best choice.**

Playing video games can stimulate you in a way that actually contributes to your stress. Instead of playing video games, try finding the humor in your everyday life. Humor is a wonderful antidote to stress, and laughter is a natural and healthy way to release tension and put aside serious thoughts for awhile. But remember not to confuse genuine humor with ridicule. Humor enriches us all; ridicule hurts us all.

- Laughing about an amusing story

**Correct choice.**

Humor is a wonderful antidote to stress, and laughter is a natural and healthy way to release tension and put aside serious thoughts for awhile. Try finding the humor in your everyday life—

but remember not to confuse genuine humor with ridicule. Humor enriches us all; ridicule hurts us all.

- [Taking a coffee break](#)

**Not the best choice.**

Caffeine can stimulate you in a way that actually contributes to your stress. Instead of drinking coffee, try finding the humor in your everyday life. Humor is a wonderful antidote to stress, and laughter is a natural and healthy way to release tension and put aside serious thoughts for awhile. But remember not to confuse genuine humor with ridicule. Humor enriches us all; ridicule hurts us all.

## Check Your Knowledge: Question 9

Which of the following is *not* an effective response to a colleague who tells you he's extremely worried about something?

- [Use body language to show your concern](#)

**Not the best choice.**

Using body language (such as making eye contact and nodding) to show your concern actually *is* an effective response to a colleague who tells you he's extremely worried about something. The ineffective response is to suggest several possible solutions. To listen effectively to a worried colleague, it's best not to try to solve his problem but instead to understand it. If you want to comment, do so only on what your colleague is describing, rather than offering possible solutions to his problem. In addition to using body language to show your concern, you can provide occasional verbal acknowledgment, such as "I understand" or "I see."

- [Suggest several possible solutions to his problem](#)

**Correct choice.**

To listen effectively to a worried colleague, it's best not to try to solve his problem but instead to understand it. If you want to comment, do so only on what your colleague is describing, rather than offering possible solutions to his problem. In addition, use body language to show your concern and provide occasional verbal acknowledgment, such as "I understand" or "I see."

- [Provide occasional verbal acknowledgment](#)

**Not the best choice.**

Providing occasional verbal acknowledgment (such as "I see" or "I understand") actually *is* an effective response to a colleague who tells you he's extremely worried about something. The ineffective response is to suggest several possible solutions. To listen effectively to a worried colleague, it's best not to try to solve his problem but instead to understand it. If you want to comment, do so only on what your colleague is describing, rather than offering possible solutions to his problem. In addition to providing occasional verbal acknowledgment, you can use body language (such as making eye contact and nodding) to show your concern.



## Check Your Knowledge: Question 10

The *most* effective way to counter the negative effects of toxic worry is to:

- Reverse the worry equation by increasing your sense of power and decreasing your sense of vulnerability

**Correct choice.**

In any stressful situation, you can reduce the negative effects of toxic worry by increasing your sense of power and control and decreasing your sense of vulnerability. Strategies for increasing power and decreasing vulnerability include structuring your activities, connecting with people who can listen, and taking care of your health. All of these strategies give you the power to better manage your stress.

- Solve the problems that are causing the worry

**Not the best choice.**

Solving the problems behind the worry may work for some stressful situations but not for all. The most effective approach is to reverse the worry equation. In any stressful situation, you can reduce the negative effects of toxic worry by increasing your sense of power and control and decreasing your sense of vulnerability. Strategies for increasing power and decreasing vulnerability include structuring your activities, connecting with people who can listen, and taking care of your health. All of these strategies give you the power to better manage your stress.

- Ensure that you get sufficiently restful sleep

**Not the best choice.**

Getting sufficiently restful sleep may work for some stressful situations but not for all. The most effective approach is to reverse the worry equation. In any stressful situation, you can reduce the negative effects of toxic worry by increasing your sense of power and control and decreasing your sense of vulnerability. Strategies for increasing power and decreasing vulnerability include structuring your activities, connecting with people who can listen, and taking care of your health. All of these strategies give you the power to better manage your stress.

## Check Your Knowledge: Results

# Your score:

## Steps for quick stress reduction

1. Stop.
2. Breathe.

### 3. Reflect.

After interfering with the automatic stress response, you should now be able to focus on the real problem without the distractions of exaggerated worries. Reflect on the causes of your worry and consider these questions:

- Why do I leap to negative conclusions?
- Am I exaggerating the threat?
- What is the emotional "hook" that sets my stress reaction going? For example, your emotional "hook" might be that you feel unappreciated for what you do and are overburdened as well. Your supervisor should know how much work you have and shouldn't ask you to do more. The hooks are your feelings about the conditions, not the realities.
- What is the specific problem in this case? By reflecting, you can put aside the feelings and examine the immediate problem. In this case, you have several projects to perform within a limited time frame.

### 4. Choose.

The next step is to choose how to deal with the situation. Consider each available option, and then choose the one that best fulfills your goals. Ask yourself:

- What is my real goal here?
- What is the best solution to the problem?
- Do I have the skills and tools to achieve the best solution?
- What can I possibly do right now? Later today? Tomorrow?

In a work overload situation, you might choose to do one of the following:

- Prioritize the projects, and work on the most urgent one first.
- Let your supervisor know that you won't be able to finish the report until the next day.
- Plan to work during your lunch break to finish the work on time.
- Ask a colleague to help you with one or two of the tasks.

Once you've made your decision, then you can then act on it.

## Steps for decreasing toxic worry

### 1. Never worry alone.

Talk to someone you trust—a friend, partner, colleague, mentor—about your concerns. Just talking can be a relief, and your listener may even provide some reassurance and guidance.

### 2. Get the facts.

Often worry is a small problem blown out of proportion by your imagination. Before you let worry consume you, get the facts. Find out what and how big the real problem is.

### 3. Make a plan.

Don't become a passive victim of toxic worry; attack the worry by solving the problem. You don't even have to solve the whole problem at once—just make a plan and take it one step at a time, solving one part of the problem first and then the next. Bit by bit you'll overcome the problem and dissolve your worry.

### 4. Practice brain maintenance.

Maintaining your brain means caring for your body. Get enough sleep, eat a balanced, healthy diet (cut down on fats, sugar, caffeine, and alcohol), exercise every day (even a short walk will help invigorate your brain as well as your body), and practice relaxation techniques (tune out your critical voice).

## 5. Let it go.

When you can't do anything more about the problem, then let the worry go. Give it up to your past and forget about it. This may be difficult to do, but it is worth the conscious effort.

## Tips for managing worry

- Learn to distinguish between positive stress and toxic worry. Positive stress can give you the energy you need to get the job done. Toxic worry only drags you down, making it hard to achieve even small tasks.
- Do a reality check. Find out if your worry has any basis in fact. Toxic worry can distort the real situation. Check to make sure that things are really as bad as they seem. Even when there is an actual problem, it may be easier to solve than you think.
- Talk with friends or colleagues you trust. They can help you see things differently. Connect with those you know will reassure you, not those who might exaggerate your concerns.
- Take positive action to correct the problem. Don't be a victim of worry and stress. Brooding about the problem gets you nowhere. Fix the problem if you can! If not, then make the problem more manageable by making small corrective changes.
- Get help from the right sources—people who have the information you need. Often you don't have the information or tools necessary to attack a problem. Instead of worrying, take control by getting the help you need. Find out who the authority is and where you should look for answers.
- Take care of your body. Exercise daily, eat healthy foods, and get enough sleep. Worry and stress put a heavy strain on your body. Taking good care of yourself physically not only reduces the level of tension your body is coping with, but it gives you more energy to deal with the problem itself!
- Relax whenever and wherever you can. Practice relaxation techniques whenever you start to feel the first signs of tension, worry, or stress. While quick exercises that you can do almost anywhere are helpful, find the time and space for longer, more meditative relaxation—these exercises are more beneficial in the long run.
- Let worries go. If there's nothing you can do about a problem (or nothing more, if you already worked on it)—if it's simply out of your control—then you have to let the worry go. Blow it away, and start a new project, read a different book, walk another path.

## Tips for setting stress-reducing goals

- Choose a goal you value. A stress-reducing goal should be one you care about, something you want to achieve; otherwise, you won't work for it. If your main source of stress is from work overload, then your stress-reducing goal might be to start setting limits to work assignments.
- Make a formal declaration of your long-term goal. Write your goal down and post it where you'll see it every day. The formal declaration gives the goal the importance it deserves, and you'll be more likely to stick with it.
- Start with short-term goals. Long-term goals, such as becoming organized or maintaining a healthy exercise routine, take time to achieve. Short-term goals are steps on the path to that end goal. For example, if your long-term goal is to become organized, start with a short-term goal of making a to-do list as soon as you get to the office each day.

- Set specific and achievable short-term goals. Don't make your goals so vague that even you don't know when you've reached them. If you're trying to get organized, one specific short-term goal could be making file folders for important projects.
- Set reasonable time frames for your goals.
- Reward yourself for each achievement—large or small. Be kind to yourself! Don't focus on the times you forgot to set a limit on a work assignment; instead, give yourself a pat on the back each time you cross an item off your list.

## Tips for coping with difficult coworkers

- Look for good models for dealing with them. Watch how other people interact with the difficult coworkers. See if you can pick up some techniques for working effectively with them.
- Find something good about the difficult person. When you focus on finding good qualities about the person, you may discover they outweigh the annoying features. And you may find it easier to get along with them.
- Recognize your own annoying habits. You may discover that you do some things that bother other people in the office. If so, perhaps you could try to change some of your ways.
- Talk with your supervisor confidentially. Let your supervisor know what the problem is. She may be able to help mediate between you and the difficult colleague or provide some other form of support.
- Try to work the problem(s) out. Sit down and have a talk with your colleague. If you can work out the problems with this one person, then everyone in the office will benefit. It's worth the effort.
- If you can't work things out, then it's time to set limits. Give the person feedback; let her know what the boundaries are for her behavior. Ask politely first, but make sure you are clear about your request for quiet, space, or whatever the issue may be.
- Don't gossip about the person with other coworkers. It's certainly important to notify your supervisor about your concerns or try to talk directly to the difficult person, but gossiping about it with others in the office only creates negative feelings and deeper rifts.
- If all else fails, stay away from them, if possible. The easiest way (and sometimes the only way) to deal with difficult colleagues is simply to avoid them!

## Tips for listening effectively to a worried colleague

- Pay full attention to the speaker. Don't try to perform other tasks such as answering the phone or filing papers. Listen carefully to what is being said.
- Use body language to show your concern—a person under stress wants to be heard on all levels. Make eye contact with and lean toward the speaker. Nod your head to show you understand. Use facial expressions to indicate feelings.
- Respond every now and then with a verbal acknowledgement such as, "I understand," or "I see what's happening."
- Restate the speaker's point in your own words to make sure you understand what they are trying to convey.
- Comment only on what the speaker is describing. Don't try to solve the problem; just try to understand it.
- Acknowledge the feelings behind the words. You can even identify them by saying, "It sounds as though you're feeling very hurt (or angry or frustrated)."

## Worry self-assessment

Worry Self-Assessment	
<p>While this self-assessment is not a scientific meter to measure levels of worry, it can give you a helpful look at how much you worry in comparison to others, information you can use to seek remedies. For each response below, give yourself a "0" if your answer is "rarely or not at all," a "1" if your answer is "sometimes," "2" points for "often," and "3" points for "almost every day." A guide for evaluating the results is at the end.</p>	
Question	Rating
1. Do you wish you worried less?	
2. Do worries pop into your mind and take over your thinking like an annoying loud noise?	
3. Do you find yourself worrying about even when you are working or doing OK?	
4. Do others comment on how much you worry?	
5. Do you argue with (or disagree with) others about how much you worry?	
6. Do you find that worry clouds your judgment?	
7. Do you usually get along with worry?	
8. Do you dwell upon success or worry you were unfairly treated, abandoned, unexpectedly fired, downgraded, or otherwise victimized by someone?	
9. Do you worry that good friends will lose you?	
10. Do you worry about your health as a way to avoid your work, or about how old you is or how you are measured?	
11. Do you worry about money more than you really need it?	
12. Do you know or do other people tell you that some of your worries are measured?	
13. Do you become immobilized by worry?	
14. Are you more concerned about you with you were with when others are not of you?	
15. Do you develop physical symptoms as a response to stress?	
16. Do you tend to be afraid of possible dangers rather than doing something about it?	
17. Do you find yourself unable to be concerned when you worry?	
18. In the case of an accident, do you find yourself feeling apprehensive, wondering what will go wrong?	
19. Do you feel that the danger is almost like something you are not concerned about?	
20. Are you inhibited in other ways?	
21. How much do you procrastinate?	
22. Are you plagued by a feeling that something can work out well?	
23. Do you dread to use the telephone?	
24. When you are alone, do you feel a sense of dread, wondering what bad news may have arrived today?	
25. Do you avoid responsibilities?	
26. Are you nervous?	
27. Are you alone more than you'd like to be?	
28. Do you find responsibilities and/or commitments hard to take?	
29. Do you find yourself always in a hurry to get things done when you're otherwise a good worker?	
30. Do you wonder if someone is out to get you or is trying to take advantage of you?	
31. Do you tend to discuss to superficial people who are cheerful or agreeable?	
32. Is it hard for you to break off conversations, even if you know the conversation is important?	
33. Do you feel in a hurry to be around others you don't really like?	
34. Do you feel uncomfortable for conversations?	
35. Do you have a great capacity for worry, worrying over some relatively minor issues as if it were a major concern?	
36. Do you feel compelled to worry about common but minor things, such as a business deal falling through, out of an almost impossible feeling that if you don't worry, it will happen?	
<p><b>Scoring</b></p> <p>The minimum score on this test is 0, the maximum score is 108. Here's a rough breakdown of what your score could mean:</p> <p>0-41 Low. You are not as concerned as many.</p> <p>42-70 Moderate. Some of the behaviors described in this report may be helpful to you.</p> <p>71-108 High, danger zone. This much worry is a signal for you physically or emotionally, and can seriously affect your life as well as being in addition to using some of the suggestions described in this report, you might also consider consulting a professional.</p> <p>© 1994 Harvard Business School Publishing. All rights reserved.</p> <p>Adapted from "How Much of a Worry Are You?" by Barry R. Schermer, Ph.D. New York: Dell Publishing, 1991. Adapted with permission.</p>	

## Life changes as stressors checklist

Life Changes as Stressors Checklist	
<p>Change, even positive change, involves stress. Listed below are some common stressful events. Check off the ones that apply to you, and add them up to get a picture of your current stress level and some of its sources. Use this information to select strategies that can help you manage or diminish your stress level.</p>	
<b>Personal Changes</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Personal injury/illness/handicap	<input type="checkbox"/> Change in financial state
<input type="checkbox"/> Pregnancy (yours or partner's)	<input type="checkbox"/> Sexual concerns or difficulties
<input type="checkbox"/> Ending a relationship	<input type="checkbox"/> Quitting smoking or other substance use
<input type="checkbox"/> Life changes (such as a certain birthday, menopause)	<input type="checkbox"/> Dieting
<input type="checkbox"/> Change in self-worth	<input type="checkbox"/> Values conflict
Other: _____	
<b>Family Changes</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Marriage	<input type="checkbox"/> Partner starting or stopping a job
<input type="checkbox"/> Family member(s) leaving home	<input type="checkbox"/> Illness/healing of a family member
<input type="checkbox"/> New family member(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> Death of a close friend or family member
<input type="checkbox"/> Separation/divorce	<input type="checkbox"/> Parents' ill relations
<input type="checkbox"/> Trouble with in-laws or other family members	
Other: _____	
<b>Work Changes</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Change in workload	<input type="checkbox"/> New supervisor
<input type="checkbox"/> Change in pay	<input type="checkbox"/> Retirement
<input type="checkbox"/> Starting a new job	<input type="checkbox"/> Change in hours
<input type="checkbox"/> Promotion/demotion	<input type="checkbox"/> Change in job security/day off
<input type="checkbox"/> Change in relationships at work	<input type="checkbox"/> Merger or acquisition
Other: _____	
<b>Environmental Changes</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Natural disaster (earthquake, fire, flood)	<input type="checkbox"/> Moving to a new climate
<input type="checkbox"/> War or conflict	<input type="checkbox"/> Moving to a new culture or country
<input type="checkbox"/> Moving to a new house or apartment	<input type="checkbox"/> Remodeling
<input type="checkbox"/> Moving to a new neighborhood	<input type="checkbox"/> Crime in neighborhood
<input type="checkbox"/> Moving to a new city	
Other: _____	

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Adapted from "Major Life Changes as Stressors," Stress Management Dashboard, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Health Services, 1996.

## Workplace stress assessment

Workplace Stress Assessment	
Use this informal assessment to help identify (either by yourself or with a work group) the current level of positive and negative stress in your work environment. Then discuss or brainstorm strategies that can either increase the positive energy level or diminish the unhealthy dis-stress.	
<b>Positive Stress</b>	
I think the current level of positive, energizing stress in my (our) workplace is: (Check one)	
<input type="checkbox"/> low	<input type="checkbox"/> moderately low <input type="checkbox"/> average <input type="checkbox"/> moderately high <input type="checkbox"/> high
Positive sources of energizing stress include: (Check all that apply)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Challenging but attainable goal	<input type="checkbox"/> Effective leadership that motivates
<input type="checkbox"/> The ability and resources to meet critical deadlines	<input type="checkbox"/> Solving new problems
<input type="checkbox"/> Team spirit and a "we-can-do-it" attitude	<input type="checkbox"/> The opportunity to learn new skills
<input type="checkbox"/> Diverse or innovative assignments that stretch employees	<input type="checkbox"/> The resources to deal effectively with a crisis
Other:	
Ideas I have to increase energizing stress (for example, a friendly competition) are:	
<b>Negative Stress</b>	
I think the current level of negative, toxic stress in my (our) workplace is: (Check one)	
<input type="checkbox"/> low	<input type="checkbox"/> moderately low <input type="checkbox"/> average <input type="checkbox"/> moderately high <input type="checkbox"/> high
Negative stress is being shown in: (Check all that apply)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Increased irritability or temper outbursts	<input type="checkbox"/> Overall reduction in productivity
<input type="checkbox"/> Conflict between team members	<input type="checkbox"/> Increase in employee burnout/turnover
<input type="checkbox"/> Increased absenteeism or number of sick days	<input type="checkbox"/> People "tuning out" decreased engagement
<input type="checkbox"/> Higher level of errors and mistakes	
Other:	
Ideas I have to reduce toxic stress are:	
The single action that if implemented, would make the greatest positive difference is:	
<b>Workload</b>	
How would you rate your workload (or that of the group)?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Too low	<input type="checkbox"/> Just right <input type="checkbox"/> Too high
Is this situation temporary, long-standing or subject to change?	
Is the workload stimulating or overwhelming?	
If the workload needs adjustment are there any work processes (how the work is done) that could be changed, eliminated, or modified? Which ones?	
Are there opportunities to change the amount of work by adjusting deadlines, outsourcing, hiring more temporary or permanent help, or taking on the assignments? Can you rotate assignments? Take some time off? Other ideas to prevent overload or burnout?	

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Adapted from "Major Life Changes as Stressors," Stress Management Database, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Health Services, 1996.

## Why Develop Others?

"At the end of the day, you bet on people, not strategies."

Larry Bossidy  
Former CEO, AlliedSignal

In today's global business environment, markets and regulations change quickly. Competitors constantly innovate. Technological changes are the norm.

In order to outmaneuver the competition and meet the demands of the moment, organizations must be agile. They must execute flawlessly. And they must transform themselves continuously.

Are your leaders ready?

Dr. Noel M. Tichy  
Professor  
University of Michigan Ross School of Business



We have now entered an era where I don't care what industry you're in, you need leaders who can make decisions, make judgment calls at every single level. All the way down to the interface with the customer.

If you go to a company like Google or any of the high tech companies, a lot of the innovation that Amazon does is happening right at the front line. Go ahead, try it, put it out there, we'll learn from it. That cannot happen if the senior leadership doesn't have a commitment to both develop the leadership capability, but develop the business through engaging people at all levels of the organization.

### Becoming a teaching organization

I like to tell parents that they cannot delegate their responsibility to develop their children. And I think it is the same in an organization. Day in and day out the person that has the biggest impact on people in the organization is the next level above and the associates around and below. And so to build a learning organization I say is not enough. Learning could be, you know we are learning cooking, we are learning this or that, but teaching organizations, when I learned something, I have a responsibility to teach my colleagues.

So everybody takes responsibility for generating new knowledge and it is not enough to be a learner, you then have to translate it into teaching.

### The Virtuous Teaching Cycle

The role of a leader is to ensure that the people who work for them and around them are better every day. There's only one way to make people better. It's to teach them, learn from them, create what I call "virtuous teaching cycles", not command and control.

A virtuous teaching cycle is teach learn, teach learn. And the leader has a responsibility for reducing the hierarchy, for having a point of view to start the discussion, but then to be responsible to hear everyone's voice, get everyone involved in a disciplined way. It is not a free for all. But it is the leader's responsibility to create that virtuous teaching cycle.

A wonderful example of virtuous teaching cycle is the program that Roger Enrico ran at Pepsi, where every one of the 10 vice presidents comes with a business project.

Roger Enrico gets smarter as result of five days with 10 vice presidents, because he's learning from them. He needs to lower the hierarchy. He needs to be open to learning. And in turn, the people participating need to be energized and empowered to come up and engage in problem solving.

Another example is at Best Buy, where every morning in the stores you would bring 20 associates or so together and they would review the profit and loss statement from the day before, what we learned from the different customer segments in our stores, what we can do to improve our performance this day. And they do that every single day. The store manager was learning mostly from the associates on the floor.

That was a virtuous teaching cycle were everybody is teaching everybody, everybody is learning and the result has been an incredible result at Best Buy.

"The growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership."

- Harvey S. Firestone

Founder, Firestone Tire and Rubber Co

There are clear advantages to leader-led development.

But for many leaders, taking on teaching, coaching, and other development responsibilities can seem daunting. You might avoid taking on these roles due to lack of time, resources, or your own lack of comfort with this role.

The following tips and resources can help you impart valuable learning to your team every day.

To develop others...

- Start with a Teachable Point of View

The first requirement of being able to develop other leaders is to have what I call a teachable point of view. I often give the example of, if I ran a tennis camp and you just came to day one of the tennis camp, I better have a teachable point of view on how I teach tennis. So you are standing there looking at me and it has got four elements. One, the ideas, well how do I teach the backhand, the forehand, the serve, rules of tennis. Then if I am a good tennis coach, I have a set of values. What are the right behaviors I want, how do I want you to dress, how do I want you to behave on the tennis court.

But if that's all I have, what do I do? Show you a power point presentation and then expect you to hit 500 backhands, 500 serves, run around for eight hours. I have to have a teachable point of view on emotional energy. How do I motivate you to buy in to the ideas and values?

On one end of the spectrum it could be I threaten you with corporal punishment, the other I can give you stock options, I can make you feel good about yourself, I can help you develop as a human being, what motivates you.

And then finally, how do I make the tough judgment calls, the yes/no, decisions as the tennis coach, the ball is in, the ball is out. I don't hire consultants and set up a committee, it is yes/no. And the same with running a business, what are the products, services, distribution channels, customer segments that are going to grow top line growth and profitability of the organization.

What are the values that I want everyone in the organization to have, how do I emotionally energize thousands of people, and then how do I make the yes/no, judgments on people and on business issues. So the fundamental building block of being able to develop other leaders is to have that teachable point of view just like the tennis coach.

To develop others...

- Lead with questions

Questions are hugely important because you want to create dialogue and again, what I call a virtuous teaching cycle where the teacher learns from the students and vice versa. Which means everybody ought to be free to ask whatever is on their mind, whatever it will take to get clarity and understanding, but it is not the leader just coming in and freeform asking questions. I believe the leader has a responsibility for framing the discussion, for having as best they can a teachable point of view, they may need help from their people in flushing it out, but they need to set the stage but then it has to be a very interactive, what I call virtuous teaching cycle environment, teach learn, teach learn, teach learn.

To develop others...

- Make it part of your routine

A good example to me of an outstanding leader developing other leaders is Myrtle Potter who at the time I am commenting was Chief Operating Officer of Genentech running the commercial side

of the business. And she would take time at the end of every single meeting and do some coaching of the whole team on how we could perform as a team better, and then she would often take individuals and say, could we spend 10 minutes over a cup of coffee, I want to give you some feedback and coaching on that report that you just presented on or how you are handling a particularly difficult human resource issue, but it was part of her regular routine. And I think the challenge for all of us as leaders is to make that a way of life and it is built into the fabric of how we lead and it is not a one off event, three times a year. It is happening almost every day.

To develop others...

- Make it a priority

One of the biggest challenges in getting people kind of on this path is to overcome some of their own resistance, either fear or the way I view the world I don't have time for this, everybody can make time. Roger Enrico is CEO of Pepsi. He didn't have time to go off for a week at a time and run training sessions. He had to readjust his calendar. So it requires you to look in the mirror and say, is this important. If it is important, of course I can make the time. Then I have to get over my own anxiety on how well I can do it, but it is a commitment to get on the path that says: this is how I am going to drive my own performance and the performance of my colleagues.

To develop others...

- Learn to teach

I think the biggest mistake is to assume you are going to be good at it right off the bat. It is like learning anything else. First time you go out and try and play tennis, good luck. But you got to stay with it and you got to engage your people in helping make you better and them better. And so it is a journey you need to get on, not I am going to do it perfectly when I start out.

If you want to be a great leader who is a great teacher, it's very simple. You have got to dive into the deep end of the pool. But you've got to dive into the pool with preparation. I don't want you drowning. I want you succeeding. It is extraordinarily rewarding for most human beings to teach others. I think once you can turn that switch on, it is self perpetuating. You get a lot of reinforcement, your team is better. You perform better because your performance goes up and it becomes this virtuous teaching cycle.

Your opportunity to develop others

We've heard why developing others can drive greater business results, and how to make the most of your leader-led development efforts. The materials provided in Develop Others enable you to create personalized learning experiences for YOUR team within the flow of their daily activities. Use the guides and projects to engage your team quickly. And to explore how key concepts apply to them in the context of their priorities and goals.

The value of teaching is the performance of the organization is totally dependent on making your people smarter and more aligned every day as the world changes. In the 21st century we are not going to get by with command and control. We are going to have to get by with knowledge creation. The way you create knowledge in an organization is you create these virtuous teaching cycles where you are teaching and learning simultaneously, responding to customer demands and changes, responding to changes in the global environment. My bottom line is if you're not teaching, you're not leading.

A leader's most important role in any organization is making good judgments — well informed, wise decisions about people, strategy and crises that produce the desired outcomes. When a leader shows consistently good judgment, little else matters. When he or she shows poor judgment nothing else matters. In addition to making their own good judgment calls, good leaders develop good judgment among their team members.

**Dr. Noel M. Tichy****Professor, University of Michigan Ross School of Business**

Dr. Noel M. Tichy is Professor of Management and Organizations, and Director of the Global Business Partnership at the University of Michigan Ross School of Business. The Global Business Partnership links companies and students around the world to develop and engage business leaders to incorporate global citizenship activities, both environmental projects and human capital development, for those at the bottom of the pyramid. Previously, Noel was head of General Electric's Leadership Center at Crotonville, where he led the transformation to action learning at GE. Between 1985 and 1987, he was Manager of Management Education for GE where he directed its worldwide development efforts at Crotonville. He currently consults widely in both the private and public sectors. He is a senior partner in Action Learning Associates. Noel is author of numerous books and articles, including:

For more information about Noel Tichy, visit <http://www.noeltichy.com>.

## Share an Idea

Leaders are in a unique position to recognize the ideas and tools that are most relevant and useful for their teams. If you only have a few minutes, consider sharing an idea or tool from this topic with your team or peers that is relevant and timely to their situation.

For example, consider sending one of the three recommended ideas or tools below to your team with your comments or questions on how the idea or tool can be of value to your organization. By simply sharing the item, you can easily engage others in important conversations and activities relevant to your goals and priorities.

[Steps for quick stress reduction](#)

[Tips for managing worry](#)

[Workplace stress assessment](#)

To share an idea, tip, step, or tool with your comments via e-mail, select the EMAIL link in the upper right corner of the page that contains the idea, tip, step, or tool that you wish to share.

## Discussion 1: Mastering the art of positive self-talk

For many of us, it's all too easy to fall into negative self-talk when worries or problems arise. For example, we tell ourselves we're stupid if we make a mistake. Or we convince ourselves that just because something bad happened to us once, it will always happen.

Negative self-talk only worsens worry and stress. Yet it's hard to combat because it stems from our unconscious assumptions and beliefs. Only by examining what we say to ourselves can we recognize which patterns of negative self-talk we tend to fall victim to — and replace them with more constructive forms of self-talk.

For your team members, mastering the art of positive self-talk can serve as a powerful weapon in the battle to manage stress. And that can translate directly into higher productivity, improved morale, and better on-the-job performance.

Use these resources to lead a discussion with your team about how to understand negative self-talk and replace it with positive self-talk.

Download resources:

[Discussion Invitation: Mastering the Art of Positive Self-Talk](#)

[Discussion Guide: Mastering the Art of Positive Self-Talk](#)

[Discussion Slides: Mastering the Art of Positive Self-Talk \(optional\)](#)

[Tips for Preparing for and Leading the Discussion](#)

Working through the discussion guide can take up to 45 minutes. If you prefer a shorter 15- or 30-minute session, you may want to focus only on those concepts and activities most relevant to your situation.

## Discussion 2: Managing stress in our group

Just like any individual, your entire group can experience stress in all its forms — positive, energizing stress along with negative, toxic stress. And when the scale tips toward the negative kind of stress, your group can suffer ills ranging from lowered productivity and plummeting morale to burnout, turnover, and interpersonal conflict.

To avoid this scenario, your team members can take stock of the positive and negative stress levels in the group and then work to enhance energizing stress while mitigating toxic stress.

Use these resources to lead a discussion with your team about how to tip the scale away from negative stress and toward the positive stress so important to team performance.

Download resources:

[Discussion Invitation: Managing Stress in Our Group](#)

[Discussion Guide: Managing Stress in Our Group](#)

[Discussion Slides: Managing Stress in Our Group \(optional\)](#)

[Tips for Preparing for and Leading the Discussion](#)

Working through the discussion guide can take up to 45 minutes. If you prefer a shorter 15- or 30-minute session, you may want to focus only on those concepts and activities most relevant to your situation.

## Start a Group Project

Just like any change effort, successfully incorporating new skills and behaviors into one's daily activities and habits takes time and effort. After reviewing or discussing the concepts in this topic, your direct reports will still need your support to fully apply new concepts and skills. They will need to overcome a variety of barriers including a lack of time, lack of confidence, and a fear of making mistakes. They will also need opportunities to hone their skills and break old habits. To help ensure their success, you can provide safe opportunities for individuals and your team as a whole to practice

and experiment with new skills and behaviors on the job.

For example, to encourage the adoption of new norms, you can provide your team members with coaching, feedback, and additional time to complete tasks that require the use of new skills. Management approaches such as these will encourage team members to experiment with new skills until they become proficient.

Group learning projects provide another valuable technique for accelerating team members' development of new behaviors. A group learning project is an on-the-job activity aimed at providing team members with direct experience implementing their new knowledge and skills. Through a learning project, team members discover how new concepts work in the context of their situation, while simultaneously having a direct and tangible impact on the organization.

The documents below provide steps, tips, and a template for initiating a group learning project with your team, along with two project recommendations for this topic.

Download resources:

[Tips for Initiating and Supporting a Learning Project](#)

[Learning Project Plan Template](#)

[Learning Project: Turn Worry into Action](#)

[Learning Project: Adopt Stress-Reducing Habits](#)

## Monitor and Manage Your Stress Level for Top Performance

Judith A. Ross. "Monitor and Manage Your Stress Level for Top Performance." *Harvard Management Update*, April 2009.

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### Summary

We all know what a stress-induced rush of adrenaline feels like—and that it can dramatically increase our focus and boost our performance. But if that rush of adrenaline and other stress hormones becomes a constant, our ability to focus, think creatively, and perform at our peak is impaired. Find out how you can dial down your stress level and maintain your top-level performance.

## Overloaded Circuits: Why Smart People Underperform

Edward M. Hallowell. "Overloaded Circuits: Why Smart People Underperform." *Harvard Business Review*, January 2005.

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### Summary

Frenzied executives who fidget through meetings, lose track of their appointments, and jab at the "door close" button on the elevator aren't crazy—just crazed. They suffer from a newly recognized neurological phenomenon that the author, a psychiatrist, calls attention deficit trait, or ADT. It isn't an illness; it's purely a response to the hyperkinetic environment in which we live. But it has become

epidemic in today's organizations. When a manager is desperately trying to deal with more input than he possibly can, the brain and body get locked into a reverberating circuit while the brain's frontal lobes lose their sophistication, as if vinegar were added to wine. The result is black-and-white thinking; perspective and shades of gray disappear. People with ADT have difficulty staying organized, setting priorities, and managing time, and they feel a constant low level of panic and guilt. It is possible to control ADT by engineering one's environment and one's emotional and physical health. Make time every few hours for a "human moment"—a face-to-face exchange with a person you like. Get enough sleep, switch to a good diet, and get adequate exercise. Break down large tasks into smaller ones, and keep a section of your work space clear. Try keeping a portion of your day free of appointments and e-mail. The author recommends that companies invest in amenities that contribute to a positive atmosphere.

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